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META'S FAITH.

VOL. I.

META'S FAITH.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

"ST. OLAVE'S," "JANITA'S CROSS,"

"JEANIE'S QUIET LIFE,"

&c. &c.

"In our days, a man is the son of his own deeds."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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To Philippa.

META'S FAITH.

CHAPTER I.

"LET me wrap this plaid round you, Miss Waldemar. The wind from our Carriden-Regis moors are colder than you expected at this time of the year."

The above remark, and one or two equally unimportant observations respecting the weather, the lateness of the season, the appearance of the crops, and the beauty of the surrounding scenery, formed the summary of a conversation which passed between Fergus Ellesley, D.D., Governor of the new Dissenting College of Carriden-Regis, and Meta Wal-

Ellesley was a safe man to trust with much more than the comfort of a seven miles' drive, —safe to trust with even the comfort of a whole long lifetime. Without feeling, too, that any kindness he gave would be given with the smallest possible expenditure of outward demonstration, and also given where it would be received with the smallest possible amount of expressed gratitude. For if there was one thing more than another which plagued the Governor of Carriden-Regis College, it was the noisy thankfulness of people who had an overflow of language at command; and if he ever did shrink from the call of duty, it was when that duty summoned him to act the agreeable towards elegant ladies, or young girls just budding forth, like this Meta Waldemar who sat beside him now, into all the grace and attractiveness, and perhaps the affectation

and frivolity too, of incipient womanhood.

Indeed, it was nothing but the Doctor's native kindliness of heart, just a habit he had formed of being willing to help anybody and everybody who needed helping, which had induced him to comply with Mrs. Waldemar's request, and escort her daughter home from the Millsmany station, instead of allowing that young lady to perform the journey in the Carriden-Regis omnibus, a conveyance which on market days—and this happened to be market day—was sometimes inconveniently crowded, besides being a somewhat plebeian mode of transit for people of the class to which Mrs. Waldemar prided herself upon belonging. Few guessed what a trial it was to the reserved, abstracted Doctor to keep up the smallest running fire of conversation with people who expected to be plied with incessant small attentions and polite inquiries

relative to their personal comfort, asked every quarter of a mile whether the carriage was going too fast or too slow, whether their wraps were properly adjusted, whether the wind was blowing too rudely upon them, whether anything in the world could be done to add to their convenience, or prevent their delicate susceptibilities from being interfered with. With men of his own class, Dr. Ellesley could get on very well. No one was more at home than himself in Greek roots, Latin derivations, Hebrew terminations, or the latest tit-bits of German heterodoxy. Where all that had to be accomplished was the exchange of information, detail of facts and opinions on some given subject, few men were so accessible and conversable as the Governor. Indeed, the students were wont to say that an hour of after-dinner chat with him, or a cosy spell of talk in his

private room, such as the more industrious of them enjoyed from time to time, was worth a whole week of solitary cramming towards examination seasons. He seemed to know everything, and he was so ready to tell what he knew, and used to put it before them so plainly, too, hedging it about with no pedantic phraseology like some of the less experienced professors, who strove to make up by grand words for their paucity of thinking power. But when the conversation chanced to be of that kind which required not knowledge of facts, but knowledge of human nature, particularly its feminine side, and the power of adapting oneself to its little peculiarities so as to produce a favourable impression, then the worthy Doctor was completely floored. Then the veriest noodle of an undergraduate could have borne away the palm from him, and confirmed in the female

mind its conviction of the superiority of cultivated noodleism over a well-stored brain which had no room amongst its weightier treasures for the small coin of social intercourse.

For the Doctor was a very shy man. Nature had dowered him but sparingly with polite gifts, and even those which he did possess had grown rusty with long disuse. For so many years he had held himself aloof from female society, except that of his mother, who had lived with him since her widowhood, that the power of enjoying it, or even of making a tolerably important figure in it, had well-nigh deserted him. Moreover, like many other shy, studious men who live much alone, he was very sensitive to the praise or blame of others, and to this sensitiveness he joined a singular simplicity and unworldliness of spirit, which really marred his comfort in

that social arena, where to seem and not to be, is the great secret of success. He was far too genuine. He would not say what he did not feel. He had no skill to play upon others, and make them feel pleased with him through having previously made them feel pleased with themselves by some graceful little stroke of flattery. And so, little by little, he had fallen out of his place in society, and now contented himself with preserving in retirement that peace of mind which perhaps a larger knowledge of the world would have taken from him.

Five and twenty years ago, when the present Governor of Carriden-Regis College was a young man, just beginning to feel the ground of a good position firm under his feet, and able to look back upon early difficulties honourably conquered, he married his first love, Agnes Elliot, a very unaffected,

ral society as gravely and quietly as heretofore.

"So very unfeeling," as the friends of the deceased said one to another, discussing the recent bereavement. "And such a sweet creature, too. So devoted to him as poor Mrs. Ellesley was. But it's just like the men. For my part I shouldn't wonder if he has his eye upon someone else at this very moment. Take my word for it, that house on the Carriden-Regis road will have a new mistress before twelve months are out."

But as the orthodox year of mourning drew to a close, and no one was even hinted at as likely for a successor to the first Mrs. Ellesley, and then as winter after winter passed away, and still that lonely home remained lonely as ever, no new wife moving through its silent chambers, no fresh face brought there for brightness in place of that

which Death had taken, these same dear friends and gossips began to change their tone.

They talked of grief indulged to an unwarrantable degree, of duties to society, of the position which Providence had given to Mr. Ellesley,—he was now second-master in the school—and the need of some suitable person to assist him in filling the larger sphere of usefulness, to which advancing prosperity had introduced him. And a few of his more active friends, thinking that as the ability of making a choice for himself had been withheld, it was their duty to make it for him, kindly sought to draw him out of his retirement, with a view to matrimonial results; and even suggested to him various ladies of family and means, one of whom might, by a judicious course of procedure, be induced to occupy the position which his late

degree probable, considering the failing health of the present head-master—if not that he should prove himself worthy of all these advantages by bestowing them on some sensible, appreciative woman, whose companionship would supply the only lack which a man in his position could feel? He must cease to look mournfully into the past. He must wisely improve the present, especially the invitations and introductions which were so freely offered to him, and which, if he only followed them up, would assuredly lead him before long into his providential path. And he must go out to meet the shadowy future with a manly heart, and, if possible, a womanly heart to beat in company with it, that being the only way in which any future, shadowy or bright, could be at all successfully met.

The only effect of this well-meant advice

was to drive the object of it more and more into that studious retirement which habit had made second nature to him. At last Mr. Ellesley's energetic friends decided to do what they had very much better have done from the very beginning, namely, let him alone. And they did this the more hopelessly because, three or four years after his wife's death, he arranged for his mother to come and live with him; thus, as it were, distinctly stating to society at large his intention of remaining in that state of single blessedness from which it was expected he would long ago have seen the desirability of departing.

After old Mrs. Ellesley's domestication in her son's household, his friends gave him up as impracticable. Only, as they passed that elegant villa on the Carriden-Regis road, into which he had removed, and noted its

general air of substantiality and comfort, they used to say one to another—

"What a shame for a man with such a home as that, not to marry again."

CHAPTER II.

AFTER his wife's death, the world treated Fergus Ellesley very well. He had not been a widower many months when, as we have already seen, he was appointed second-master of the school in which he began his course with quite a subordinate position. Soon afterwards he was made head-master, with a handsome salary and a comfortable residence provided, on the strength of which everyone expected, but in vain, that he would take to himself a wife. Shortly after his appointment to the head-mastership, the Dissenting college at Millsmany was removed to new premises built for that pur-

pose about a mile from the village of Carriden-Regis, and the old governor having died, full of years and honours, Mr. Ellesley was elected his successor. After that, letters crept in couplets and triplets to his name. Fergus Ellesley, D.D., &c., replaced the simpler nomenclature by which he had hitherto been known in public, and the men of his church began to talk of him as a person of mark, likely to adorn, if not to render entirely illustrious, the once almost ignored denomination to which he belonged.

A successful man. A very successful man, as people said, tracing his path from that quiet little home in which he began the journey of life with Agnes Elliot, upward through a long course of honourable toil to the position which, unassailed by a word of envy, unvexed by a breath of calumny, he filled so well now. Filled it, too, not as men often

fill such positions when the labour of attainment has taken from them well-nigh all their vigour, the race having cost more than the goal is worth; but with undiminished force and vigour, comparatively a young man, with many years of available working power, and so much health and leisure at command as might serve to make the literary labours of his profession a delight to him. That which men sometimes reach only when the hand that grasps it is too palsied any longer to hold it fast, had come to him while yet the years of his strength could be counted by many a one, and while much of life lay before him to build up and compact the honourable name of which men already began to speak with pride.

Only, as people still kept saying one to another,

"Why *does* not Dr. Ellesley marry again?"

It was such a shame, they said, that a home like his, and a position like his, and fame like that to which he was attaining, should be unshared by anyone but a failing, infirm old lady, whose age prevented her from dispensing the hospitalities of the house, and whose very gentle, retiring nature made her unfit to sustain his position in society, and whose ignorance of the outside world, and all that went on therein, caused even his increasing fame to be matter of little rejoicing to her, so incapable did she seem of any sort of triumph in it.

But the years that brought him competence and honour and worldly position, never gave back to Dr. Ellesley what they took away so long ago, when the light of Agnes Elliot's smile went out of his home. Not even the dawn of any other love, nor the longing for it, had dimmed the remembrance of what

that quiet, gentle-hearted woman had been to him. The memory of her love, so pure, so perfect, was enough. Given to him in its actual presence for such a little season, it had yet journeyed with him all through life; and being fulfilled with it, and holding it dearer to him than any other hope or promise which the future could hold out to him, it had gradually gathered his whole self more and more into its holy keeping. All that he could give was given there—all that he needed to receive, it gave to him.

It was partly this sense of contentment with an ideal possession, this continually deepening faithfulness to the memory of a woman whose nature was the perfect complement of his own, and whose place no one he had ever yet seen could fill, which little by little had drawn him away from general society, had made it at last a strangeness

and weariness to him. What men needed from him when he mingled with them—facts, information, knowledge of books, minds, systems of thought—he could give easily enough, and with a readiness which made his company eagerly sought by literary people. What the most of women needed, what seemed to be essential to pleasant intercourse with them, deference, flattery, all those little acts of homage and gallantry which are usually paid by unappropriated men to their companions of the weaker sex, he could not give, and the feeling of his unfitness to give them made him shrink away from all society in which they were required or welcomed.

So that it was at the expense of his own private inclination that Dr. Ellesley had so benevolently acceded to Mrs. Waldemar's request, and arranged to bring Meta home from Millsmany when he went there, as he

usually did once or twice a week, to transact college business, or execute some trifling commission for his mother, who seldom took such a long ride herself now. The very last thing in the world which the kind-hearted Doctor would have chosen, was an hour's companionship with a modern fashionable young lady of boarding-school type, such as those he had been privileged to meet when at rare intervals he ventured into the whirlpool of social intercourse at Carriden-Regis or Millsmany. Of course he had no right to expect that Mrs. Waldemar's step-daughter would be any exception to the rest of her sex. Reasoning from analogy, he might look for the same pretty airs and graces, the same hankering after flattery, and evident dissatisfaction if it was not forthcoming, which had hitherto bewildered him in his scanty experience of fashionable female society. Or,

worse still, he might expect to be confronted with a battery of smiles and compliments and conscious fascinations, which to a shy, self-distrustful man, incapable of returning it in kind, or even of receiving it with anything like heroic fortitude, is so very bewildering. The thought of that seven miles' drive had seriously marred the Doctor's peace of mind ever since he had so benevolently committed himself to it. It had spoiled the comfort of his prelections in the class-room only the morning before, and completely disarranged the threads of reflection which, before Mrs. Waldemar's call, had been weaving themselves so felicitously into the form of a discourse for the following Sunday. He would rather have gone through a day's close literary work, or listened to any amount of trial homilies from divinity students, or presided at a dozen college committees, than volun-

tarily have gone through an ordeal like that to which the kindliness of his disposition had just bound him.

But Mrs. Waldemar had requested his escort for her dear Meta as such a very great favour. The dear girl, she said, was so unaccustomed to travelling alone, and the omnibus was so very indiscriminate, even at the best of times, for anyone who was not used to that sort of thing. She was quite sure that she owed Dr. Ellesley a thousand apologies for trespassing on his kindness to such an extent, but really she often felt so terribly inconvenienced now, in consequence of not having a gentleman to fall back upon for any of those little attentions which she had been accustomed to; so long. In poor dear Mr. Waldemar's time things used to be so different. She never knew what it was to have to beg a favour from anyone in poor

dear Mr. Waldemar's time; for he really anticipated every want, indeed she thought she might almost say every whim, with such beautiful devotedness, and never allowed her to have a wish ungratified, that she often said she was the very last person in the world who ought to have been left unprotected, to depend upon herself for everything. It was so perfectly different to anything she had ever expected. The Rector, who was always exceedingly gentlemanly and attentive, would have brought dear Meta home with the greatest pleasure, but his little pony-carriage was only constructed for two, and Mrs. Gilbertson had business in town which compelled her to accompany her husband on this particular day, so that a seat there was out of the question. And then Mr. Goverly, Mr. Waldemar's successor in the practice, to whom she naturally turned for any accommodation

of this kind, had gone from home for a few days, leaving the house shut up; and Mr. Danesborough, the Carriden-Regis steward, was a person she never respected sufficiently to allow herself to ask a favour from him; so that, as she might say, she was almost compelled to trespass on Dr. Ellesley's kindness, and she should look upon it as the very greatest favour in the world if he would be so kind as to meet dear Meta at the station, and give her the vacant seat in his carriage, as he was intending to drive over to Millsmany on the day of her return home.

So the solicitor's widow, a tall, graceful, dark-complexioned, well-preserved woman of five-and-forty, said with slightly grieved accents, and an air of gentle dependence, as she sat in the Governor's drawing-room at Carriden-Regis College, whither she had gone to make arrangements for this bringing home

of her step-daughter Meta from the neighbouring town of Millsmany. And as she said it, she glanced round upon the draperies of blue silk tabouret, new only a year or two ago from one of the best furnishing houses in Millsmany, and the handsome velvet pile carpet, and the well-chosen furniture, and the exquisite specimens of old china—warrant of good descent that old family china—which was arranged on an oaken cabinet between the windows. And from these she glanced to the Doctor's mother, a comely old lady, fast sinking into the vale of years—so fast sinking into that vale, indeed, that in the ordinary course of events Dr. Ellesley could not hope to retain her with him much longer. Poor Mrs. Ellesley already looked so frail, that she might slip away almost at any time from mere decay of nature, without any lengthened premonitions of that affecting

event, just as the Rector's mother dropped off a year or two ago to a blissful eternity, in the eighty-second year of her age. And then everyone knew what would be the most natural thing in the world for the Doctor to do—what would, in fact, be the only thing that he could do, under the circumstances. Because, of course, it was absolutely essential that he should have a lady of dignity and good breeding to sit at the head of his table, and give stability to his position. A position like his was quite 'thrown away without a lady to sustain it; and a wife would be so much more suitable than even dear old Mrs. Ellesley, who, with all her sweetness and amiability, was scarcely equal, in consequence of age and rapidly increasing infirmities, to the duties which devolved upon her as female head of the Governor's private establishment. A position of that kind required energy and

a certain degree of style in manner and bearing, neither of which were quite natural to dear old Mrs. Ellesley. No doubt he would feel her removal very much whenever it pleased Providence that it should take place, for they were so beautifully attached to each other, and his deportment as a son was admirable in the extreme—a perfect homily, as she might say, to all the young men in the college, if only they would be wise enough to profit by it, and behave to their mothers as the Governor behaved to his. But still there was nothing like a wife for a man in his position, and dear old Mrs. Ellesley's removal might almost be looked upon in the light of a blessing to the Doctor and the institution of whose interests he had charge, if it led him to supply her place by a suitable life companion—a lady who would draw him out, and prevail upon him to assume his pro-

per position in society, and help him to shake off those exceedingly shy, reserved habits which of late years had been growing so painfully upon him. So painfully, indeed, that if he gave himself up to them very much longer, they would get him completely under their control, and then he would be lost for ever to the charms of feminine companionship, and become a confirmed old bachelor. The very last thing in the world that a man with a good income and a beautiful home and a first-rate position ought to become.

There is no need to suspect that any such thoughts as these passed through Mrs. Waldemar's mind as she sat in the elegantly-furnished drawing-room aforesaid, chatting with her usual sweet impulsiveness—Mrs. Waldemar was always sweetly impulsive, except in the bosom of her own family, and

then the impulsiveness was anything but sweet—first to the grave, quiet Doctor, who was indeed a shade too grave and quiet for her tastes, and then to his venerable mother, the dear, good, amiable old lady whose slipping away to a blissful eternity at no very distant period was to be followed by such momentous changes to the Carriden-Regis establishment. No one—not even the most critical observer of human nature—could have discerned from any lurking consciousness in Mrs. Waldemar's words and ways that that visit of hers had been planned for the last three weeks, and that Meta's homecoming, apparently falling out by the merest accident, had been arranged by her stepmamma for the very Saturday when the Rector and his wife were going to town together, and Mr. Goverley's conveyance was locked up in his coach-house, the proprietor

thereof having taken his wife and family into the country for change of air, and that therefore, the omnibus being always so inconveniently crowded on market-days, Mrs. Waldemar had no alternative but to trespass on Dr. Ellesley's kindness by requesting the vacant seat in his little basket-carriage. A request which, as she affirmed, cost her so many scruples, and so much hesitation and reluctance, and which she could never have allowed herself to make, had it not been that things were so very different now from what they used to be in poor dear Mr. Waldemar's time. She never knew what it was to be obliged to lay herself under obligation to anyone in poor dear Mr. Waldemar's time.

And then the snowy eyelids down drooped over those beautiful dark eyes, whose brightness and beauty fifteen months of widowhood had not been able entirely to dispel. And

Dr. Ellesley, who, as we have already seen, was a kind-hearted, benevolently-disposed man, said that he should be very glad to accommodate Mrs. Waldemar, and that really the bringing home of the young lady would not involve so much trouble on his part as to make it at all needful for Mrs. Waldemar to look upon it as a favour. And then, as that lady's gratitude seemed entirely disproportionate in its depth and fervour to the very small obligation he was conferring, and as Dr. Ellesley was a man who could not bear to be thanked for more than he gave, he added that she might at any time command a seat in his carriage when the friends to whom she generally looked for such a trifling accommodation were unable to give it. In that offer the Doctor's benevolence overcame his common sense, or, at any rate, his personal preferences, which were very apt to

have the worst of the bargain when the convenience of other people was set against them. But he really felt that unless he promised something more to Mrs. Waldemar than the favour she asked now, she had changed the obligation from herself to him by such an unexpected overflow of affectionate thankfulness.

This was how it came to pass that Fergus Ellesley, D.D., one of the most shy, undemonstrative, retiring of men, and Meta Waldemar, step-daughter of a lady who was neither shy, nor undemonstrative, nor remarkably retiring, happened to be, as the phrase goes, "thrown into each other's society" for that seven miles' drive from Millsmany to the sweet little village of Carriden-Regis.

CHAPTER III.

IT was a beautiful valley, the valley of Carriden-Regis, through which they were passing. Nature had dowered it with all that she could spare from the bolder picturesqueness of the hill country beyond. She had closed it round with uplands whose daisy-dotted pastures lay side by side with many a copse of larch and hazel; copses where in spring time there was a purple bloom of violets, and in summer a snowfall of hawthorn blossoms, fair and dainty. She had sheltered it from the biting east winds by groves of beech, which in autumn blushed crimson-red for the overwarm glances of the

October sun, and then as the young year dawned, opened, to catch the sweet breath of its April winds, myriads of tiny green buds, spreading by-and-bye into a leafy shelter, where the blackbird sang his first song, and the nightingale came in still June evenings to pour out his strain, "most musical, most melancholy," to lovers who wandered hand in hand beneath.

It was watered, too, this valley of Carriden-Regis, with a brook clear as those which ripple along through Highland glens. A little brook in whose sunny shallows the minnows sported, and over whose sedgy brink the dragon-flies darted like rays of living light. And as the little brook struggled out from its rocky cradle amongst the hills, widening into a deep silent stream, its course was guided, as by some loving hand, through pastures of tender grass, and cornfields from

which in spring the larks uprose singing loud and high for joy at the merry sunshine which had come back again, and clover meadows over whose red ripe blossoms the bees hummed through many a long summer day.

This, dame Nature did for Carriden-Regis whilst yet not a homestead of hind or shepherd had been planted beneath its sheltering hills. And when, centuries ago, one of the Plantagenet kings, passing through it on some royal progress, fell in love with its peaceful beauty, and founded a church there, and gave to the place his own kingly name, Nature still kept it under her loving charge, and brightened the handiwork which human skill raised there, with her own, more rich and rare. For as years rolled on, she wove over the church which that Plantagenet king had founded, a robe of moss and ivy more beautiful than all the carved work of cun-

ning sculptors. And upon the quaint timbered homesteads which sprung up one by one around it, she laid brown and golden stains of lichen, flushing so warm in the autumn sunshine; and where the grey church tower showed too cold, she dashed it with a russet mould on which the many-coloured mosses crept out; and where it vexed her taste by its sharp exactness of outline, she took the liberty of crumbling it away and bringing in a clasping tendril of ivy to fill the vacant place. She laid her fairy touch, too, upon the tall pointed gables of the old Manor-house, breaking off useless crockets and carvings, that her own daintier garniture of vine-leaves might twine there instead, and that the swallows and martins might find a sheltered spot to build their nests, unobserved by malicious youngsters from beneath. And she clothed every cottage

roof with a green thatch of houseleek, and spread some fancy work of moss or creeper over even the barns and hovels whose ragged fronts peeped out amongst the apple-orchards; and as century after century slipped silently away, she brought up over all the place an air of repose and venerable decay, so that everyone who looked upon it, linking its aged beauty with the memory of long-past generations sleeping now beneath the shadow of its churchyard yew-trees, said there was no village in all the country round like the village of Carriden-Regis.

That was what the good people of the neighbouring town of Millsmany said, and thought too. That was the reason why, as their scrip increased, and their bankers' books became more bulky, they left the busy town whose vast warehouses and reeking chimneys had helped them on to competence, and set-

tled themselves in "elegant family residences," as the newspaper advertisements called them, smart red houses of gingerbread Gothic or fancy Elizabethan architecture, which had been run up in the vicinity of the old village, and whose resplendent fronts and imitation oriels looked as much out of place there as the tinsel decorations on some rare old Catholic shrine.

Millsmany was a famous place for wool spinning and weaving. You might count its warehouses by hundreds, its chimney-stalks by thousands. At certain hours of the day its streets overflowed with mill-hands—coarse frowsy-looking girls with red kerchiefs over their heads, and faces scarce recognizable by reason of the dust and fluff which had gathered upon them from the teazing out of bales of wool. Troops of lean gaunt men, too, poured out of the mills; men with a

grim, defiant expression of countenance, yet full of strength and courage, and desperate steady endurance; men who, when the time came, could suffer on through months and years of famine, making no sign, speaking no word of complaint, but just dying when the battle became too hard for them. These were the men who made Millsmany what it was, the most wealthy and prosperous manufacturing town in that part of the country. They, and not the splendidly-built warehouses which people came so far to see, not the looms and engines and spinning-jennies which kept up such a continuous accompaniment to labour's many-voiced anthem, were the true power of the place, the silent unacknowledged spring of all its glory and greatness. With their influence, with that cunning of hand and brain which they could give or withdraw, the tide of wealth in that

great town of Millsmany ebbed and flowed

Centuries ago, when Carriden-Regis was in its prime, when courtly ladies and knights in mail of steel trod the pleached alleys of the old Manor-house garden, when stoled priests chanted their matins and evensongs by the altar of St. Wilfred's church, and cavaliers and courtiers held speech beneath those ancestral trees where now whole colonies of rooks cawed undisturbed through the breezy April days, Millsmany was just nothing but a cluster of mud hovels, built by some herd of vagrants to shield their children and womenfolk from the winds which swept so keenly across the eastern moors. Within the memory of that mythical personage, "the oldest inhabitant," a common, overgrown with coarse rank grass, covered the space at present occupied by the wealthiest part of the town; and the sunshine, cleaving its way

through mirk and fog, struck down on clusters of reed-thatched cottages, where now, instead, huge warehouses gathered the produce of countless mills into their barred and guarded chambers, or thronged manufactories emptied into the ever-waiting barges, waggons, and drays, those interminable bales of goods which, by-and-bye, transported by land or sea to every civilized part of the world, would leave in their stead such store of wealth to the merchants who had already more than they could reckon.

Even yet, so resistless was the march of improvement in the hale and lusty town, an inhabitant who left it in his early youth, and came back when middle age had planted a grey hair or two upon his brow, would in all probability find the home of his babyhood swept away to make room for some gigantic mill or pile of warehouse buildings; a purple

flood of refuse dye staining the little brook where, with a crooked pin and a bit of string, he used to fish so patiently for minnows; a row of workmen's cottages wafting the smoke of their united chimneys along the shady lane, in the topmost branches of whose shadowing elm-trees he used to find such store of birds' nests, and beneath whose hedgerows the earliest primroses thrust up their yellow buds through the moss, some twenty Aprils ago.

The years which had covered Carriden-Regis with mould of age and decay, had brought wondrous store of importance to its mushroom companion of mercantile notoriety. Formerly that cluster of mudbuilt tenements and thatched hovels was entered in parish registers as the "outlying hamlet of Millsmany, near Carriden-Regis." Now, the stately old village had well-nigh lost its identity,

and only held on to a feeble tenure of existence by reason of its proximity to the great manufacturing town, whose very neighbourhood it had once thought scorn to acknowledge, and which in its heart of hearts it despised even yet. There was ever a tacit coolness, unconfessed, yet very carefully cherished, between the aristocratic old families who had flourished, they and their progenitors before them, for centuries in the grey, mouldering, ivy-covered tenements of the village proper, and the purse-proud manufacturers from Millsmany, who, with pedigrees short in proportion to the length of their purses, and with stout, coarse faces, which told in every line and feature the commonplaceness of the moneyed upstart, had yet the audacity to perch their toy-box villas, stuck over with pilasters and pinnacles and pediments, in the very face of St. Wilfred's

church, and invade its time-honoured parish boundaries with the roll of uncrested yellow carriages, whose liveried footmen and powdered drivers were abundantly equal, in blood, if not in scrip, to the over-dressed and loud-spoken women who gave themselves such airs within.

Yes, unconfessed, but most carefully cherished, was this enmity between the good people of Carriden-Regis and Millsmany. The currents of the Rhine and the Rhone flow not more distinctly and separately side by side, though occupying the same river bed, and journeying towards the same far-off sea, than did the two tides of aristocratic and mercantile life in that Plantagenet-honoured little village. The quality proper of the place, the stately maidens, dowagers, widows, and landed proprietors, whose ancestors slept beneath marble urns and sculptured canopies in St.

Wilfred's Church, never forgot the half-dozen mud hovels out of which the Millsmany set had sprung, nor the fluffy warehouses, smoky chimneys, and huge overgrown dye-vats from which their ostentatious display was still supplied. And the Millsmany set, on their part, were accustomed to elevate their plebeian noses with undisguised contempt when, coming out of their own villa residences, enriched with all the improvements of modern architecture, they passed the tumble-down mansions of the old folks, and noted, as only well-to-do people can note, how pride and poverty were contending for dominion there, and how every crumbling gable, and each worn-out lattice shaking in its once massive stone-work, told of fortunes as shaky, and a rent-roll as far on its road to extinction.

Yet perhaps if the proud little village which had once been honoured by a Plantagenet

king's admiration and patronage, could have laid aside a little of its ancestral exclusiveness, and considered the common-sense aspect of matters, it might have found itself a gainer rather than otherwise by reason of its proximity to that "great centre of mercantile enterprise and industry," as Millsmany was always designated by public speakers. For though there was an unmistakable disagreeableness in having the sanctity of the place invaded by any rubicund mill-owner who had scraped together, out of the brains and sinews of his workmen, money enough to build himself a commodious family mansion within its parish boundaries; and though it was anything but satisfactory to behold the said mill-owner's wife and daughters flaunting their costly Paris millinery in St. Wilfred's Church, in impertinent contrast with the very limited displays of provincial skill which even the su-

premest of the *ancien régime* were able to put forth in that direction; and though the uncrested yellow carriages which kept rolling up and down the one long quiet street of the village, were much more profitable to the toll-gate proprietor than soothing to the feelings of the decayed gentlefolks, who were obliged to do their morning calls in the seediest of old-fashioned barouches, drawn by antiquated steeds who had long ago lost the fire and sprightliness of youth;—still a breeze of animation *did* sweep sometimes from the many-peopled town to the sleepy village seven miles away, and prevented it from sinking into utter stupor and inanity. There were lectures and concerts and theatrical performances, and horticultural fêtes and scientific gatherings at Millsmany, to all of which mundane gaieties those of the Carriden-Regis people who had spare cash at command,

night, if they were so disposed, be conveyed in an omnibus which plied once a day between the two places. And in September Millsmany gave a grand ball, patronized by the county families for the encouragement of trade in the place; and in spring it gave another, in honour of the yearly training of the militia; both which festive occasions, though very much marred, as the Carridenegians said, by the infusion of the mercantile element, were certainly convenient for ringing out young ladies whose parents could not give them the advantage of a season in town, and whose entrance into the fashionable world, with all its attendant privileges, must therefore be secured for them by some such provincial means as a second-rate place could afford.

Then again, for those whose tastes led them in that direction, Millsmany offered a

fine selection of popular preachers, and frequent opportunities of excitement in the shape of public meetings or charitable bazaars, got up regardless of expense, and presided over by ladies, the sight of whose bonnets alone, new from the Continent, was worth the entire cost of admission, to say nothing of the privilege, apparently so highly valued by bazaar-goers, of paying twenty shillings for an article which has cost as many pence. Then there were demonstrations in the Trades' Hall, astounding indignation-meetings, the thunder-claps of whose enthusiasm resounded even to the quiet little village seven miles away; and there were reviews and regattas and galas, with attendant fireworks and balloon ascents; and to all of these many-coloured bubbles on the stream of Millsmany life, this same enterprising omnibus proprietor conveyed the Carriden-Regis people, and

then set them down again at their own doors, for the modest sum of eighteen-pence, toll-bar included.

Finally, if these combined privileges had not been sufficient to warrant a small amount of gratitude on the part of the village aristocrats, there was the new College, only a mile away from St. Wilfred's church, a really handsome building, whose cloisters and turrets and façades, to say nothing of the beautiful grounds which stretched away from it to the Carriden-Regis woods, would have been an ornament to any landscape, if the beholders thereof could have forgotten that it was *only* a Dissenting Institution. In this new college there were about fifty students, most of them pleasant, gentlemanly, agreeable young men, who made a welcome addition to the else scanty supply of male society in the place.

But of this additional object of thankfulness, with the consequences its proximity might possibly involve, more hereafter. For whilst we have been dwelling upon the social relations of Carriden-Regis and Millsmany, the Governor of this same college has been driving his young lady companion from the station, and Mrs. Waldemar, in her new black silk dress with jet ornaments, has been fidgeting over a piece of fancy-work, counting the moments until Doctor Ellesley's basket carriage may be expected to draw up at the door of Percy Cottage.

Mrs. Waldemar says she is reckoning *so* much on the arrival of darling Meta, Mr. Waldemar's only child. Life has been such a terribly lonely thing for her since poor Mr. Waldemar died. She is quite sure that a woman of her exquisitely impulsive and susceptible nervous temperament, was never

meant to live alone, or with such limited companionship as Miss Hacklebury, the maiden sister of domestic tendencies, can afford. And she knows she shall dote so upon Meta when the dear girl comes. She is sure she shall never know how to make enough of her. She really has such a passionate necessity in her nature for loving someone, someone who can understand her, and sympathise with her, as poor dear Mr. Waldemar used to do.

But Joanna, the upper girl, who fastened Mrs. Waldemar's dress, and adjusted her jet ornaments an hour or two ago, and who sits in the front kitchen now with a piece of plain sewing, does not think Miss Waldemar's coming home is the reason why her mistress waits so impatiently for the arrival of Dr. Ellesley's basket-carriage.

Joanna is a quiet person, but much given

to meditation, and she has more than once said to herself since she came to the situation at Percy Cottage,

"She's a cunning sort, very, is Mrs. Waldemar, and mostly knows a vast more nor what folks thinks she do."

CHAPTER IV.

WITH Miss Waldemar, who had been committed to Dr. Ellesley's care in so unexpected and even unwelcome a manner, was, after all, no very formidable companion. Even the shyest, most retiring of men need not have feared a seven miles' drive with her, for she would have made but slight demand upon his cavalierly attentions, nor would she have shown any of a spoiled belle's pettish resentment at their absence. She was almost as quiet in her own way as the Governor himself, only the ways were different, his quietness being the result of long habit, rooting it into his nature beyond

any power of society or circumstance to pluck it thence, whilst hers was as much the result of accident as of disposition. She could have talked, and perhaps have enjoyed talking too, if something in her companion's manner had not said more plainly than any words could speak,

"Please to let me alone. I choose to be still."

And Meta Waldemar had that delicate tact, not given to many, of knowing when to talk and when to be silent—a tact the want of which is sufficient at times to change even the pleasantest of women into unmitigated nuisances.

Accordingly, she held her peace, and bore the long cold ride as patiently as she could. At the beginning of it Dr. Ellesley gathered her wraps round her with that fatherly, unassuming care which he was accustomed

to bestow upon all, young or old, fair or plain, gentle or simple, who chanced to need it. As he did so, he made the opening remark which has already been chronicled, and then, after a few other equally unimportant observations, he composed himself to what appeared to be a diet of meditation. At least, Meta interpreted it as such, and prudently forbore breaking in upon it.

She was a pleasant-looking girl, just pretty enough to be conscious of that attractive power without which a girl, if neither brilliant nor intellectual nor conceited, is apt to be bowed down under a painful sense of inferiority; but not sufficiently charming to assume that air of fascinating nonchalance which an acknowledged beauty so soon learns to put on when in the society of those who may be expected to ply her

with the sweet incense of their flatteries. She seemed to occupy an intermediate position between the fast and dowdy types of young-ladyhood. There was nothing particularly stylish about her dress and manners, neither was there that manifest neglect of outward adornment so frequently to be met with in the supremely excellent young person who has a soul quite above the paltry desire of attracting admiration. She lacked the thorough-bred composure and hauteur which characterized the upper ten of Carriden-Regis—those proud dames and splendidly-descended damsels whose unmixed aristocratic blood seemed to assert itself in every step, and tone, and gesture; but, at the same time, she was equally guiltless of the noisy display, the elaborate gentility, the affectation of "quality manners" by which the mushroom young ladies of Millsmany sought

to hide the commonplaceness of their antecedents. She was just the sort of girl that anyone, man or woman, might find a pleasure in looking at; since women, who are not always impartial admirers of beauty in their own sex, could not reasonably find fault with her on account of her surpassing charms, and there was a sweetness and gentle grace about her bearing, which is sometimes a surer passport to a man's favour than either beauty or brilliance.

But her personal appearance, whatever it might be, and the qualifications of her character, however loveable they might prove on closer inspection, were as yet apparently matters of the most absolute indifference to the Governor of Carriden-Regis College. He just sat there beside her, wrapped up in his great-coat, between which and his broad-brimmed wide-awake only a small segment

of facial development was visible; now and then addressing a word of remonstrance to the pony when it was inclined to loiter on the road, and at very rare intervals dropping a remark to the quiet girl at his side; but as for any impression produced upon him, she might have been for the first half hour of their companionship one of those prettily got-up lay figures which move by springs in the drapers' windows, to show off the folds of a new kind of petticoat, or display the peculiar excellences of a fashionable mantilla.

It was a cold evening towards the close of April. Clusters of hawthorn and cherry-blossom, with here and there a wild rose in the hedges, told that summer could not be very far off; and many a primrose and wind-flower, peering up through rank grass, hinted of sweet spring days that must have

come and gone since their little buds lay close folded down under the brown last year's leaves. But this night was cold enough for March. An east wind came moaning over the moors beyond Millsmany, ruffling the larches on the hill-side, making the young beech trees tremble as it passed over them and then wandered away with a sharp eerie sigh through the belfry-tower of St. Wilfred's. And ragged shreds of black cloud scudded about over the grey sky, now and then falling in sharp showers; or when there was no rain, a thick mist, following the wind, fell almost as coldly on the travellers as they shivered amongst their coats and wraps.

Just the sort of night to make even the most amiable person in the world ill-tempered, Miss Hacklebury said. Miss Hacklebury was sitting opposite sister Waldemar

in the Percy Cottage dining-room, knitting a pair of stockings for an old woman in her district. It is to be hoped the stockings would be more comfortable than the aspect of the lady who was at work upon them; for Miss Hacklebury did not scruple to affirm that if one thing under heaven tried her temper more than another, it was the east-wind, coming back again when you had a right to expect that it had taken its departure for the summer. People bore with it in February and March, she said, as patiently as they bore with cleaning time and preserving-time and painting-time, when those periodical nuisances came round; but to have it thrusting itself upon you when the muslin curtains were put up and the list-bags taken down, and the winter covers stripped off the furniture, and the best-room fireplaces made up with shavings or crinoline or tissue

paper beyond the possibility of being taken to pieces again; *that* was an imposition not to be tolerated by any one with the slightest independence of spirit. After the spring cleaning had been got out of the way, east wind was a thing that called for vehement abuse, and from Miss Hacklebury, at least, it got what it called for. For, as the side-passage door kept banging backwards and forwards—it always did so when there was an east-wind, Buttons, the under girl, leaving it open by instinct at such times—Miss Hacklebury's displeasure vented itself in indignant jerks of the unconscious stocking, and occasional exclamations the reverse of gentle; and from time to time, when she could bear it no longer, she would get up with a start which set all Mrs. Waldemar's nerves in a quiver, and dash out into the kitchen to administer a vigorous rebuke to

Buttons, between whom and the east wind Miss Hacklebury could almost bring herself to believe there was some sort of secret understanding, the girl seemed to have such satisfaction in admitting it to the entire range of the interior premises.

But the wind did not make Meta ill-tempered. It only touched her cheek into a pretty pink bloom, which contrasted pleasantly enough with the shadow of her little black velvet hat and the masses of soft light hair which were gathered away into a net to keep them neat for travelling. It did not appear to exercise any perceptible influence, either, on Dr. Ellesley, who sat beside her, grave and upright as was his wont, almost hidden from mortal sight in a shaggy greatcoat with fur-lined cape and collar. Meta thought the Doctor was

perhaps a popular preacher, and needed to nurse his voice for city halls and public rooms. She had heard of popular preachers sometimes, who kept all their agreeableness for great occasions, and turned the reverse aspect to those who had to do with them at home. Dr. Ellesley might be a man of this sort, and yet she scarcely liked to think it of him, for what she could see of his face had a certain pleasantness in it after all, a pleasantness not bidden there for the occasion, but there by use and habit, belonging to him like his upright bearing and the very grave measured tones in which he addressed her now and then.

They were about half-way from Millsmany to Carriden-Regis. The smoke of the great town hung like a dim stain upon the horizon. Already the gurgling of the brook amongst the rocks which vexed its course

could be heard, mingling by-and-by with another sound, the chiming of bells from the distant town of St. Wilfred's. Very dim at first, almost swept away by the gusts of wind that still came swirling across from the eastern moorlands, but falling with more and more distinctness on the ear as they reached the narrow winding lane which led into the village.

"What are the bells chiming for?" said Meta. "They never used to have a week evening service here when I have been before. Oh! I know now—it is Easter Eve, and Mr. Gilbertson likes to have it observed as a festival."

This was the first time Meta had volunteered a remark on her own responsibility since they set out from the Millsmany station; and she was half sorry that she had made it now, for Dr. Ellesley seemed disinclined to take

any notice of it, beyond a very curt, uninterested reply,

"Easter Eve?" he said, in a dubious tone, as though not at first attaching any meaning to the words. It had not been much in his way to observe fasts and festivals of late years. "Easter eve. Yes, of course, yesterday was Good Friday, and therefore this must be Easter eve."

And then he scarcely spoke to her again, all through the rest of the ride. But Meta noticed after that, that the reins lay very loosely in his hands, and there was even a more abstracted look than before in his face. And once, when she turned to rest herself from the somewhat constrained position into which such an unaccustomed mass of shawls and plaids had forced her, he was looking down upon her very earnest-

ly, as though searching in her face for a fancied likeness to some lost friend. Old Miss Warrener, her great-aunt down in the south, with whom she had lived ever since she was quite a child, used to look at her sometimes just in that way, and then say how like she was to her poor dear mother, who died so long ago. She knew, too, that Dr. Ellesley's thoughts were far enough away when he looked at her so earnestly, for when she happened to return that look with one of half unconscious inquiry, he did not attempt to turn his eyes away, but just kept gazing on in the same abstracted way, never apologising for the apparent rudeness, nor appearing to know that he was taking any especial notice of her.

"What a very quiet man he is," thought Meta to herself. "I do believe he would

much rather have come home by himself. I am sure he did not want me to ride with him."

CHAPTER V.

AND still the bells kept chiming, chiming clearer and more distinctly as they neared the village.

Fergus Ellesley spoke no word, but he was thinking of another Easter tide, more than twenty years before, when on an April evening, not so chilly as this, he had listened to other bells chiming as pleasantly as the bells of St. Wilfred's; listened not alone.

He was a young man then, looking out into the future, as one sees a fair landscape in the early morning time, before midday storms have had time to dim its blue

sky of promise. Sitting beside him then, as Meta Waldemar sat beside him now, was a young girl over whose grave the daisies had been growing for all these years; but for whose death he had not been such a lonely quiet, thoughtful man as the world knew him for now.

Twenty years ago, and he had never forgotten her, never sought any other to be to him what she was. He had been content to live a lonely life for all these years, doing his duty as God gave him strength to do it, carrying out his little light into the great dark world, helping those who needed his help, doing such good as men may do by the example of their daily walk and conversation, seeking no great name for himself, caring not to be much talked of or loudly praised, caring only to fill well his own place, and, dying, leave behind

him a name which good men might love to cherish.

Such had been his life for twenty years. Such he expected it to be, even to the end. No more brightness in it than the doing of duty might bring, no more love than was given him by the peaceful-hearted woman whose old age he tended with such pious reverence. And all for a girl who had been his wife for a few little months, and then died. He had made no great outcry about her death; he had uttered no vows of life-long mourning for her. He had received her last breath upon his lips, and stood by whilst they laid her in the grave beneath the church tower of her native village; and then he had come back, a little sadder, perhaps, but calm as ever, to the work of his life, doing that faithfully, year after year, year after year, until now he was a middle-aged

man, not much sought after in polite society, never invited to its fashionable gatherings, or partaking of its elegant hospitalities; chiefly valued by a few musty old professors who respected his literary attainments, and one or two students to whom he had been a tried and trusty friend. Not certainly a very brilliant life, but perhaps the world hitherto had given him as much as he was qualified to take from it. Such as that life was, it contented him, and if

"Our content is our best having,"

then Fergus Ellesley was not an unhappy man.

Such was the Governor of Carriden-Regis College, who had come to Millsmany station on this misty April evening, for the purpose of meeting a young lady stranger, and escorting her home to her step-mother.

A friend of Mrs. Waldemar's had met Meta on the arrival of the train, and introduced her to the companion of her journey.

"Miss Waldemar, Dr. Ellesley. Meta, dear, this is the gentleman who has kindly undertaken to drive you home in his carriage. Your mamma thought the omnibus would be uncomfortably crowded, this being market-day."

Whereupon Dr. Ellesley and his youthful charge bowed to each other, she noting nothing more than that he was a middle-aged man, kindly and pleasant-spoken; he seeing in her an ordinary, unassuming girl—he scarcely looked at her long enough to observe what she was like—not quite so noisy, certainly, as most fashionable young ladies, nor so full of airs and graces, but still in nowise more interesting than scores or hundreds whom he had met when he used to

go into company more than he had cared to do for the last few years. And then, having taken their places in the carriage, and having said good-bye to the lady who had met Meta at the station, they set forth upon their ride.

A tedious, uncomfortable ride through the cold and wind and rain of an evening which seemed to have fallen by mistake into the sweet calendar of late April, blotting its flowery promise with the sullen reminder of winter's sternness not yet overpast. A ride which both of them heartily wished at its conclusion, and only endured by Dr. Ellesley with such patience as he always endeavoured to bring to the discharge of any duty, however irksome, which the convenience of others seemed to lay upon him.

Until those chance words of Meta's roused him, and opened the gate of the old me-

mories. They came back to him peacefully, quite naturally, just as in dreams we see, without any sort of strangeness and wonder, the faces of long dead friends. The quiet ride to that little village, *her* home, more than twenty years ago, the chime of church bells, the bells of Easter-tide, floating over hawthorn shaded lanes, the ripple of the brook, the scent of purple lilacs coming from the cottage gardens—all these things, unforgotten through half a lifetime, came back upon him now. The time, the place, the associations, the surroundings were strangely like.

Ay, and even the companionship. For, turning at Meta's words, and looking for the first time earnestly upon her, it seemed to him that this young girl with the fair hair, gentle voice, and meek unaffected ways, might have won them all from the lost love

of that old time. Suddenly, with startling distinctness, the past, so long folded up and laid away, returned to him. It seemed to him that Agnes Elliot was once more sitting by his side. He let the sweet fancy linger and tarry in his heart, distilling there like the magician's tincture on some faded, outworn scroll, revealing again, as clearly as when the finger of hope first wrote it, the story of his long past love.

She was no stranger to him now, this Meta Waldemar, whose hand he had held in his own so carelessly not an hour ago. His wife, the only woman he had ever loved, dead and buried twenty years ago, looked at him out of her eyes, spoke to him with her voice. Nay, could it be so long ago? For as after dreamless unbroken sleep, we wake, and with no consciousness of time past, take up the hopes and joys and long-

ings which were gathering round us when the curtain of forgetfulness fell over memory and soul, so Fergus Ellesley, remembering not the long waiting and loneliness, took up where he had left it in the years of early manhood, the unfinished story of his life; and with the simplicity and purity and single-heartedness of that happy time, began to live it again.

He woke from some such thoughts as these with a feeling of disappointed surprise, to find that the college gardens were close upon them, and that a quarter of an hour's driving at the most would bring them to Percy Cottage, where Mrs. Waldemar was awaiting the arrival of her step-daughter. So soon, and now he could willingly have driven many and manya mile, even through such wind and rain as had followed them all the way from Millsmany, for the sake of a few more

moments of his strange new-found happiness. He felt as if he could not let her go away from him, and so destroy the spell which, the more he gave himself up to it, took more and more the blessed aspect of reality. Mrs. Waldemar's polite overflow of gratitude, the vigorous conversational efforts of Miss Hacklebury, who always endeavoured to draw him out into theological subjects, how could he encounter them with any sort of cordiality now, when he would fain be alone with the tide of pleasant memories, and pleasanter hopes, which in this one little hour had begun to flow in upon him?

A bright thought struck the Doctor. It was not very often that a bright thought did strike him when it was especially needed; or, being struck by it, that he had sufficient tact to avail himself of it so admirably as on the present occasion.

"Miss Waldemar," he said, trying very hard—for the Doctor was but an unpractised dissembler at best—to appear as though what he was going to propose was the most natural thing that could be proposed under the circumstances—"Miss Waldemar, I think it would be as well for us to stay at the college for an hour or two, until this heavy shower has passed over. I am sure my mother will be very pleased to see you, and I will take you home as soon as the weather clears up a little."

It was a very simple speech, but the preparing of it, and the delivering of it had cost the Doctor a great amount of mental exercise. It was so hard to speak to this young girl now as if she were a stranger. It would have been so much more natural to take hold of the little gloved hand, which was nestling amongst the rugs and wrappings,

and keeping it fast in his, as he had only cared to keep one other woman's hand, say.

"Agnes, let us go in here and rest and be quiet."

But since he could not say that to her, since she did not belong to him at all, save in the sweet fancy which had sprung up in his own heart, he must needs address her with the customary formality and deference which young ladies expect from those into whose care they have been committed. And to do that was so hard. Besides, he did not want her to think that he was proposing this arrangement because he would fain keep her with him a little longer. He was such a shy man, this studious, literary Dr. Ellesley. He would have been ready to shrink away into the farthest corner of the world if Meta Waldemar had known the in-

nocent, simple, loving illusion which she had woven around him. So far from having any pride in showing a lady that she had made a favourable impression upon him, or seeking to express his admiration by the delicate little flatteries and attentions which most people would have used, this grey-haired, grave-faced man of fifty would have blushed like any girl for the secret of his guileless heart to have betrayed itself.

Meta did not care very much what they did. She was not coming to her home at Percy Cottage with any extravagant expectations of happiness there, and so to put off the meeting with her friends who were awaiting her, did not require a vast amount of self-denial. On the other hand, however, she was a very retiring girl, unaccustomed to society; and the prospect of being introduced to any other strangers besides those

she had already encountered since leaving her aunt's home early in the morning, was one she could willingly have dispensed with. But then the rain was slowly finding its way through one after another of her cloaks, and dripping most uncomfortably from her umbrella upon Dr. Ellesley's shoulders; and, glancing up at that fur-lined collar of his, closely buttoned over his chin, the thought crossed her mind that perhaps a prudent regard for his own health had prompted Dr. Ellesley to suggest the premature conclusion of the ride. It might be as much for his own sake as for hers, that he would avoid any further exposure to the rain, which had now been coming steadily down for three-quarters of an hour. There was something in his manner, too, though he evidently tried to speak very politely, a sort of hesitation and embarrassment, which Meta thought seem-

ed to indicate a wishfulness to have done with his forced companionship, and be comfortably settled down where he could feel perfectly at ease, not obliged to play the agreeable to anyone, or put himself out of the way to appear polite.

Meta disliked encountering strangers, but she still more disliked having people take trouble for her when they were not perfectly willing to take it, or when the taking of it might expose them to any inconvenience. And that her companion did not want to take any more trouble in her behalf than he could help, she felt almost certain, from the exceeding reserve of his manner. So she agreed to his proposition about breaking their journey at the College, and they drove there at once.

After they had got rid of a few of their wrappings, Dr. Ellesley took her into the

library, where his mother usually sat in an evening. She had heard her son's voice in the hall, and came to meet him now, but stopped short, as well she might, with a look of wondering inquiry, when she found he had brought company home with him; a lady, too, the first time he had done such a thing since she came to live with him, sixteen years ago.

"Mother," said Dr. Ellesley, with a little touch of embarrassment in his voice and manner, "it was so very wet. And I thought—at least I suggested to Miss Waldemar to stay here until the rain passed over. I said I was quite sure that you—that you would not mind her coming—I mean that you would be glad to see her. Miss Waldemar, this is my mother."

Mrs. Ellesley gave the young stranger a kindly greeting, perhaps the more so be-

cause she saw at once that Fergus's awkwardly-expressed though well-meant introduction had made her feel ill at ease. But, indeed, few could have given other than a kindly greeting to Meta Waldemar. There was something about her which, far more than any surpassing charm of beauty, seemed to ask for and win the good-will of those with whom she had to do. And truly now even the charm of beauty was scarcely wanting. The long ride and the brisk wind had kindled her complexion into more than its usual colour, and given a brighter light to her eyes; and perhaps Mrs. Ellesley's motherly greeting, accorded so readily, and spoken in such kindly, assuring tones, had already done its work in replacing, with a look of quiet content, that of awkward restraint and uncomfortableness which had been the prevailing expression of her coun-

tenance since they set out from Millsmany. Here, at any rate, was some one who was glad to see her—some one to whom the doing of a kindness was not such a very painful effort as it had appeared to Dr. Ellesley. Meta had never felt or looked so bright since she bade good-bye to poor Aunt Warrener's housekeeper that morning, as she did when Fergus Ellesley's mother took hold of her hand and said—

"I am very glad to see you, my dear. Come away with me, and let me help you to take off your damp things before tea."

But as Mrs. Ellesley said it, she glanced from Meta's face to another, strangely like it, having the same delicate colouring and chiselling, the same blue eyes, the same slightly-pencilled brows, shadowed by the same soft yellow-brown hair—an old-fashioned miniature, painted on ivory, which, with

the Doctor's own portrait, each on a background of black velvet, was set in an ebony frame, and hung upon the panel just over Dr. Ellesley's writing-table. And from that picture Mrs. Ellesley glanced to her son, who, now that Meta had taken off her thick veil, so letting the lamplight fall full upon her face, was looking at her earnestly—almost too earnestly, Mrs. Ellesley thought, for the girl's comfort.

Fergus met his mother's glance, and understood it.

"Yes, mother," he said. And that was all that they ever said to each other about it.

Half an hour later they were seated by the fire, Mrs. Ellesley pouring out tea for them. Meta brightened up wonderfully under the influence of a little expressed goodwill. Hers was one of those sensitive characters which have not self-esteem enough

to take for granted what the reticence of others sometimes leaves unsaid. She never credited herself with favour, unless it was expressed by unmistakable words, looks, or tones; nor, given even in these, was she always quick to interpret it. Some girls, better gifted than herself with the admirable dower of complacency, would have assumed, from the very beginning of that seven miles' ride, that their society could not be other than a supreme gratification to the person on whom they were pleased to confer it, and they would accordingly have displayed their charms to much greater advantage, from the very consciousness that they were not doing so in vain. Meta was perhaps too slow in assuring herself of the kindness of those who had not much skill in expressing it, and therefore the whole of

her intercourse with Dr. Ellesley, up to the present time, had been marred by the vexing thought that it was thrust upon him without his desire, against his inclination.

Now, however, she began to feel herself more at home. Mrs. Ellesley's genial smile and homely, motherly ways, brought out the happy trustfulness of her nature, and made her speak and act and look her own real loveable self. She no longer laboured under the humiliating idea that her society was merely tolerated because it could not be avoided. Something in Mrs. Ellesley's manner, something in the quick, intelligent interest with which the old lady listened to her at first shy, hesitating attempts at conversation, showed her that she could not only receive, but give pleasure; and this alone was enough to make a girl like Meta

Waldemar feel ten times happier than all the compliments and flatteries in the world could have done.

CHAPTER VI.

AND still Dr. Ellesley sat there in his arm-chair by the fire; mute, abstracted, yet continually, as he looked into Meta's quiet face, gathering up more and more into the present the joys and hopes of that happy past which he once thought had gone from him for ever. More and more, now that he saw her real, undisguised self, this young girl brought back to him what he had lost so long ago. Now, for the first time since Agnes Elliot died, he found in another that mingled sweetness and gravity, simplicity and sensibility, which had seemed to set his wife apart from all other women, which had

caused her to leave an impress upon his heart so deep, so lasting, so unique, that it could never be perfectly filled up by any second love.

Yet this Meta Waldemar was by no means what is called a striking person. She had no remarkable points about her, no wonderful grace of form or feature, nothing to single her out for special admiration amongst the hundreds of well brought-up girls who succeed in the world, and make a respectable figure in after life. Perhaps the one word which best described her was *womanliness*. You could have trusted that girl, young as she was—and she could not certainly be much more than eighteen or twenty—to do you a kindness, and to do it, too, in the wisest, most fitting manner. She was just the sort of companion you would like to have when the world was not going

exactly prosperously with you, when you chanced to be in need, sorrow, sickness, or any other adversity. And this, not so much from any great overflow of voluble sympathy which might be expected from her in such circumstances—for Meta was no great talker at any time—as from a certain atmosphere of quietness and peace which seemed to surround her and ray out from her, as its fragrance from the violet, or their sweet breath from the myrtle leaves when some warm hand crushes them.

Also, the tones of her voice, her whole aspect and expression, told of a finely-tempered humility, the loving lowliness of a nature which would be always more ready to give reverence than to command it, more willing to serve than be obeyed. She was one of those girls beneath whose gentle, undemonstrative quietness all the instincts

of self-sacrificing womanhood lie hidden; one whom love, when it came to her, would easily form into the meek, devoted wife, full of mercy and good works, content to shine in the reflected light of another's greatness; glad not to share the strife herself or wear the triumph of victory, but in the quiet of her own domain to gird the armour on for him whose right it was to wear it, and to admire his laurels without envying them, when the fight for which she had strengthened him was done.

"I think I ought to go home," said Meta shyly, rather awkwardly, when they had been sitting for more than an hour round the fire after tea. "At least I ought to go, if the rain has given over."

Here she glanced timidly towards Dr. Ellesley, but he, regarding her still with his former vague, musing look, did not ap-

pear to take in the meaning of her words.

"I am afraid," she continued, "mamma will begin to think something has happened to me. I told her I expected to be home about tea-time. I could go by myself very well, if you would let me have my cloak again."

Meta had been considering for the last twenty minutes how she should make this speech. It had cost her as much trouble as that of Dr. Ellesley's, about equal in length and conciseness, in which he had proposed that they should stop at the College until the weather cleared up a little. Going to Percy Cottage was an awkward thing, involving, as it would most likely do, a fresh turn-out on the part of the Governor, who, now that he was comfortably settled by the fire, seemed so little inclined to disturb himself again, or even to join in the

conversation, beyond a chance remark now and then. There was just the same grave, abstracted look upon his face which Meta had noticed after she was brave enough to offer a remark to him about the chiming of the bells. He evidently wanted to be quiet, to be left to himself. Most likely a thought had struck him, which might be advantageously worked up into a sermon or speech for some great public occasion, and he was only waiting until she had been safely disposed of, to go into his study and make a note of it. Meta thought that the people who only saw these great men during their platform or public appearances—her mamma had sent her word that Dr. Ellesley was a "great" man—had no notion how very tame and uninteresting they appeared in private life, nor how much of previous unsociability it took to get up those blazes of eloquence, those

passages of unparalleled magnificence, which, as the newspapers said, "took the audience by storm and carried them away with the excitement of the moment."

Only, of course, when she began to talk of going home, the merest politeness would oblige him to say something about going with her, particularly as he had promised to see her safely to Percy Cottage, as soon as the rain was over. And then what a long time must elapse before the thought could be elaborated, or even noted down, and what a nuisance she must appear to him whilst she was preventing him from attending to it. Perhaps it would have "escaped him" altogether, as clergymen used sometimes to say of the thread of their discourse, when they stuck fast in the middle of it, having accidentally left their manuscripts at home. Oh! if only the laws of etiquette,

good breeding, and manners did not forbid young ladies walking out unattended after dark; or if her mamma, knowing how unfortunately she was fixed, could have sent Joanna to fetch her home. But the going home had to be mentioned, and Meta mentioned it, feeling all the old shyness and restraint come over her again as she did so.

Her words aroused Dr. Ellesley from a pleasant reverie. He had been bidding back the happy past, until it seemed more real to him than the actual present. His wife, the fair-haired, meek Agnes of twenty years ago, was sitting by him again. He had but to turn and look upon her quiet face as it had so many times risen before him in his solitary hours of study. He had but to listen, and her voice, grave, sweet, musical as ever, brought back with every word the memories of a past which was now no longer past.

But for a certain misty unreality, a dim suspicion that the whole might pass away from him like a dream, he could have stretched out his hand to clasp Meta's, and have spoken to her as he used to speak to Agnes long ago, when they two sat together, the day's toil over, in that humble little home on the Carriden-Regis road, a couple of miles from the school where he was under-master.

"What does my—what does Miss Waldemar say?" he inquired of his mother, looking as if—which was indeed the truth—he was but half awake to surrounding objects, and thereby confirming Meta's impression that it would be a terrible nuisance to him to have to face such an unmistakable reality as a mile's walk across the country to Percy Cottage.

Mrs. Ellesley was accustomed to these fits

of abstraction on the part of her gifted son. It was no new thing to watch him sit for hours, clasping and unclasping his fingers in that musing, vacant way. He always did so when anything was on his mind, and this was Saturday night. Two sermons would have to be preached by the Doctor to-morrow.

"Miss Waldemar thinks it is time for her to go home, Fergus. Will you look out and tell us how the weather is? I don't feel that I ought to press her to stay, because Mrs. Waldemar may be feeling anxious about her; though I daresay as the night has turned out so wet, she would not he surprised at your both remaining here. If it is fine enough you would enjoy the walk after your long ride this afternoon, but if not, Bateson had better put the pony in, and drive Miss Waldemar home."

"Delightful!" thought Meta, devoutly hoping that there would be just rain enough to render it unadvisable for the journey to be performed on foot. Or even, if the clouds were pouring out their contents as persistently as when she and the Doctor drew up at the College gates a couple of hours before, she would have preferred a drenching, side by side with Bateson, to half an hour's walk dry shod, under the guardianship of a gentleman who would so much rather have staid quietly at home.

But Dr. Ellesley, after steering his course to the cupboard door under the impression that it led out into the entrance, and then, having found the right mode of exit, walking mechanically upstairs to his private study, instead of making his way to the hall door to inform himself concerning the aspect of the weather, came back to report that the rain

had cleared off, and the wind had so far dried the roads that a walk would be quite pleasant.

Accordingly, Meta prepared for the expedition, wishing very much that it could have been a solitary one. As Mrs. Ellesley bade her good-bye in the hall, she took both the girl's hands in her own, and said, with a loving look, which made Meta long for the twentieth time that the Doctor's mother, instead of himself, was going to take care of her.

"My dear, we have both of us been very glad to see you, and I hope this will not be your last visit. Tell your mamma that she must bring you to call upon us very soon; and if you want a walk any fine morning, come through the Carriden-Regis wood to the College gardens, and rest yourself with me. I am always at home. Fer-

gus will explain the road to you; there is not a more beautiful walk all round Carriden-Regis than that through the wood."

Meta promised she would come very soon, and then set forth with her grave companion, who had already sauntered, whilst she was taking her leave of Mrs. Ellesley, half way down the garden, and was looking back now, as if impatient for her to join him, and get the troublesome duty over. She began the conversation this time, as soon as they passed through the college gates into the open country road.

"I am very sorry, Dr. Ellesley, to have brought you out again, after your long ride. I wish you would have allowed me to come home alone, or with one of the servants."

"Do you?" said the Doctor, seemingly bewildered by the remark. And there was

a slightly grieved tone in his voice, as though he were wounded to think that his company could be so unacceptable. "I—I thought perhaps you would like me to come with you."

"I mean," replied Meta, hurriedly, feeling that she had only made matters worse by her apology—"I did not want to give you the trouble of coming out again. I am so sorry to waste so much of your time."

"Oh! that is it!" and Dr. Ellesley seemed greatly relieved. "I don't like going out on Saturday nights at all. Of course it is an inconvenience to me, in a general way. At least, that is to say," he continued, falling unconsciously into the mode of expression which he used to the students when he wished to place a subject before them in a new and clearer manner—"that is to say, you must not think it is a trou-

ble to me to come out to-night. I don't mean that it is any inconvenience to me now. Only——"

Only, of course, you would much rather not have come, said Meta to herself, finishing the sentence for him, and taking the arm which he somewhat hesitatingly reached out to her, because, as he said, the roads were rough, and the night dark.

After this inauspicious commencement, the conversation dropped, neither of them making any further attempt to set it in motion. Once or twice, as they plodded silently on, Meta vainly endeavouring to keep pace with the Doctor's long strides, they stumbled over a mile-post or a rustic seat by the wayside, which Meta thought he, knowing the road well, might have avoided, even in the gloom, if he had not been indulging in a second diet of meditation. And once they

both came to a dead standstill in front of a five-barred gate, to which he had led her through a quantity of long dripping grass.

"Oh! I forgot," said Dr. Ellesley. "I suppose this is the Allaston toll-gate. We must just go round by the bridle road, as it is locked."

Allaston was the village, a hundred miles away, where Agnes Elliot used to live before she was married. But Meta did not know that. She thought it was most likely one of the hamlets near Carriden-Regis. At last, more apparently by chance than good management, they reached the long village street, where, once upon the flagged foot-path, the lights from the cottage windows, and the more resplendent gleam of an occasional shop front, kept them from straying very far out of it. And with a feeling of infinite relief, when they had come to the

farther end of the street, amongst the antique mansions and crumbling dwellings of the Carriden-Regis aristocracy, Meta pulled her companion's arm and said—

"Stop, Dr. Ellesley, please. You are going past the place. This is Percy Cottage."

CHAPTER VII.

MRS. WALDEMAR, dressed as aforesaid, in black silk with jet ornaments, was sitting in state in the dining-room, waiting the arrival of her daughter; or to speak more correctly, her daughter's escort, that escort having been the means of producing the somewhat unusual elegance of costume which Joanna had been called upon to arrange at an early period of the afternoon.

Black suited the relict of the late Ralph Waldemar Esq., very well, and she knew it too, and was therefore in no haste to throw it aside. But she had judiciously discarded the deeper manifestations of grief, and re-

placed the disfiguring widow's cap by a tasty little head-dress of lace, which fell in graceful lappets on each side of her face, hiding thereby a neck which was beginning to lose a few of its once flowing lines of beauty. In the course of a few months, Mrs. Waldemar intended to elaborate her *coiffure* by the addition of a scarlet feather, effectually introduced amongst the braids behind, and heightening by contrast their glossy brightness; or a massive gold pin, disposed upon the lappets so as to bring out into stronger relief the clear olive tints of her complexion. But at present, a due regard to the etiquette of mourning as set forth in the fashion books, if not a slight residuum of regret for the departed solicitor, forbade the introduction of colour into a costume, which indeed no person of any pretensions to taste could wish altered, so exactly did it hit the happy mean

between fond recollections of the past and dawning hopes for the future.

As Joanna came to open the door in reply to Meta's knock, Mrs. Waldemar, silk draperies, lace lappets and all, came floating into the lobby, bringing with her an odour similar to that of the sweet south breathing over a bank of violets; only that the violets were manufactured by Rimmel and Co., and the wind which swept over them not south at all, but east, and caused by the sudden swinging open of the side passage door, which Buttons had left as usual on the latch, to the disgust of Miss Hacklebury, who was knitting by the dining-room fire.

"So *delighted* to see you, my darling Meta," said Mrs. Waldemar, in a soft cooing voice, as she kissed her step-daughter's cheek, and then, wisely hurrying her upstairs to disrobe, lest, as she said, the dear girl should catch

cold, returned to pour out the overflow of her gratitude at the abstracted Doctor's feet.

"So *kind* of you, Dr. Ellesley, so *very* kind. But, oh, if you knew how my poor nerves have been tortured for the last hour and a half! I had *quite* made up my mind that some fearful accident must have happened, and that I should never see darling Meta again. Do excuse my giving way—" and Mrs. Waldemar put her handkerchief to her eyes—"but you know I am *so* susceptible, and really suspense of any kind is almost more than I can bear; especially since poor dear Mr. Waldemar's death. And so *very* kind of you to take so much trouble. I really felt it was quite *naughty* of me to impose upon you to such an extent; but you know——"

And here the snowy eyelids fell until

scarce a gleam of brightness could pierce their long fringes.

"You know I have been *so* dependent lately upon the kindness of my friends. And Mrs. Ellesley was so *very* obliging when I ventured to propose such a favour as your bringing my Meta home, and said she was *quite* sure you would not look at it in the light of an intrusion, as I was so *very* much afraid you might do. I am so very sensitive about asking a favour from any one. And so if you will *only* tell me that she has not been a trouble to you, I shall feel quite content. *Do* tell me, dear Dr. Ellesley, that she has not been a trouble to you."

All this time Mrs. Waldemar had been gradually retreating from the lobby into the dining-room, drawing after her the Doctor, whom politeness compelled to keep within hearing distance of the fair lady, who was

bestowing her thanks so liberally upon him. She had now reached the fire, and drawn the easy chair up to it, and in spite of sundry nods and telegraphic signals from Miss Hacklebury, the housekeeping sister, who disliked chance company coming in when there was nothing prepared for them, was pressing him to sit down and rest himself after the long ride.

"You know, Dr. Ellesley, a drive is so *very* fatiguing. Poor dear Mr. Waldemar used to say that nothing fatigued him so much as driving here from Millsmany, on account of the unevenness of the road. *Do* let me persuade you, Dr. Ellesley, to join us in a cup of tea. You don't know how delighted sister Dorothy Ann and I will be to get you anything in the world. Only say what you will take, for I am sure you must be so excessively fatigued. And such a cold

evening, too, really almost as bitter as January. Were you not saying, Dorothy Ann, dear"—and here Mrs. Waldemar turned to her sister for confirmation of her statement —"that it was almost as bitter as January?"

Miss Hacklebury, whose temper always suffered when there was an east-wind, said it was a great deal more than almost as bitter as January; and that she must have her flannels got out again from the great chest at the top of the stair that very night, if the weather did not change. And then giving her woollen shawl a vigorous tug over her shoulders, she went on to express a hope that Dr. Ellesley was very particular not to cast his flannels before May was out, because people could never depend upon the weather; it had been so very different of late to what it used to be when she was a

girl. She also informed the Doctor that she and sister Waldemar felt anything like unseasonable weather so much more keenly, on account of rheumatic tendencies. It was a thing that stirred very much in their family, she said, was rheumatism. Their poor mother had suffered from it ever since she passed the prime of life, up to the time of her death; and both herself and sister Waldemar had begun to be teased with it about the same. Indeed, sister Waldemar had been remarking for the last few years that she felt symptoms of its approach. It was such a very teasing thing was rheumatism, and always came on when there happened to be an east wind.

Whereupon sister Waldemar quitted the subject of the east wind, thinking doubtless that it had reached the limits of prudence. For, as she said to her more intimate friends

when she laid aside her widows' weeds at the end of six months because they were so very unbecoming, there was a limit to everything. And she turned her attention to the Doctor again.

"Yes, so *very* fatiguing, such a long ride over such uneven road, and on such a *very* unfavourable evening; and so if you *would* just take off your coat and let me make you a cup of tea, I am sure you would find it so very refreshing. Indeed, you must not *think* of leaving us before you have taken something, and when you have had the trouble, too, of coming so far out of your way to bring my Meta home. Dorothy Ann, dear, *do* take Dr. Ellesley's coat and hat, or shall I ring for Joanna?"

But the Doctor standing there in the doorway, hesitating, embarrassed, feeling painfully conscious of having nothing to say for him-

self, only bowed his thanks from time to time, without so much as coming forward a single step to take the easy-chair which Mrs. Waldemar had placed at his disposal, and towards which she was inviting him now with such graceful cordiality. People always said that no lady in the village of Carriden-Regis had such a way with her as Mrs. Waldemar when she chose to make herself agreeable. And that she chose to do so to-night was evident from the glances of subdued sweetness and the fascinating smiles which she continued to cast towards the doorway, with no perceptible effect, however, upon the object of them, who was evidently quite at a loss how to receive or return such unexpected outbreaks of gratitude as this very trifling service of his had called down upon him.

For Dr. Ellesley, as we have said before,

was a shy man, painfully out of his place in the generality of ladies' society, having not the slightest approach to skill in chit-chat or compliment, or even the talent to withdraw gracefully from a position in which he did not feel himself at home. He would much rather not have stayed at Percy Cottage. He wanted to go away to his own quiet fireside in the College library, and there think over this strange new-found happiness of his. He wanted to be alone with all the pleasant memories—memories quickly changing into hopes—which the last few hours had brought back to him. And yet, to his gentle, sensitive, benevolent heart, it seemed ungrateful to go away in the face of Mrs. Waldemar's kindness. It would seem like refusing her thanks. It would be like giving her to understand that he was glad to have finished his duty.

She was evidently so afraid of trespassing upon his kindness; she had expressed herself so very strongly about it. If he went away abruptly now, it would be almost like implying that she *had* trespassed upon it. And then, of course, she would feel wounded, a thing he did not want her to feel at all. He would far rather be inconvenienced himself than wound the feelings of anyone else, especially anyone who felt herself under a sort of obligation to him. And yet he did wish he could have thought of anything suitable to say, anything that, whilst not overstepping the limits of truth—for the Doctor was a strictly conscientious man—would have given him a reasonable excuse for going quietly home at once.

But Miss Hacklebury came to the rescue. Miss Hacklebury had no intention whatever that Dr. Ellesley, willing or otherwise,

should make himself comfortable for the rest of the evening in that arm-chair by the fire. In her estimation a visitor to tea, especially a gentleman, and that gentleman a minister, was a serious thing, involving much previous care and preparation, of which sister Waldemar, who never did anything in the housekeeping department, appeared to have no adequate conception. Did sister Waldemar think now,—this was what Miss Hacklebury said to herself as she sat knitting by the fire during her sister's eloquent overflow of cordiality towards Meta's escort—that she, Dorothy Ann Hacklebury, having been nearly the whole of that blessed day employed in sorting, cleaning, and arranging the household goods, as she always did make a point of sorting, cleaning, and arranging them on Saturdays, could trudge upstairs at a moment's warning,

suffering as she was from the rheumatism, too, to the store-closet on the top landing, and take down the best pea-green china tea-things from their respective pegs and hooks and shelves, and dust every single separate cup and saucer with her own hands—for, being their dear grandmother's wedding gift when she was married nearly a hundred years ago, she never let anyone touch it but herself—and sort out one of the fine damask table-cloths, which were never used except when company came, and unwrap the silver teapot from its three covers of flannel, wash-leather, and tissue paper, to say nothing of sending Buttons out for muffins and crumpets, which, as likely as not, being Saturday night, and late too, would all be sold out when the girl got to the shop,—did sister Waldemar think, now, that she could go through all that at

a moment's notice, situated as she was with the rheumatism striking down her left arm to that degree there was scarcely any use in it? And was it not much more reasonable that the Doctor should go home to his own table, where doubtless a comfortable meal was provided for him, and thus spare her all the trouble of getting out and putting away after him? Accordingly, when Miss Hacklebury saw that sister Waldemar was bent upon retaining their guest, she settled the matter at once in her own brisk, decisive way.

"Sister Waldemar," and up went the woollen shawl again with a vigorous pull over her shoulders, "I am sure the Doctor don't want to do anything of the sort, as to be kept out of his study on a Saturday night, when the preparations must naturally be heavy upon his mind; because every minister

that I've met with in my time, whether he was a clergyman, or whatever he was, always made a point of wanting his Saturday evenings private, on account of the pulpit meditations. It's a serious thing is the pulpit, as our dear clergyman at Poplar-croft used to say, sister Waldemar; you'll remember him when we used to live in the small house just opposite the church, after father had retired from the business."

Here sister Waldemar, in her turn, gave sundry telegraphic signals, expressive of displeasure at the mention of the small house and the business, but Miss Hacklebury took no notice, having but one object in her mind's eye at the present, and that object Dr. Ellesley on his road home to Carriden-Regis College.

"How he used to say, you know, sister Waldemar, when he sometimes came in to a

cup of tea in the best parlour, as we always had it there when company came, he never allowed himself to be prevailed upon to accept an invitation for Saturday evenings, wanting them for private meditation, as of course it's a most proper thing every minister should do. And so, Dr. Ellesley, sister Waldemar and I won't press you any more, because I'm sure it would be more according to your feelings to have a quiet time, and we shall both of us be very happy of your company some other day, whenever you can make it convenient to look in. I never interfere with pulpit preparations, if I know it."

Admirable Miss Hacklebury! Just the very thing the Doctor wished to say, only he could not manage to get it said, on account of the cascade of talk which kept bubbling from Mrs. Waldemar's lips. Now, however, under

cover of her more sensible sister's timely excuses, he made good his retreat, found himself with a feeling of infinite relief once again on the road to Carriden-Regis College; and half an hour later, after sundry stumbles over stone heaps, and forced haltings before five-barred gates, was sitting in slippered ease by his own library fireside.

Not engaged, however, in any such professional duties as those which Miss Hacklebury would so benevolently have facilitated for him. Partly because Dr. Ellesley was far too conscientious a man to trust the preparation of his sermons—though they were but delivered before a handful of raw students—to the precarious inspiration of Saturday, and partly because the hopes which that quiet ride called forth had overflowed and borne far away from him the cares and duties and anxieties of present life. It was no thought

of firstly, secondly, and thirdly, no painful effort to arrange his subject under the most judicious heads, or present it to the students in a form most likely to take permanent possession of their understandings, which caused such a grave smile to brighten the Doctor's face, as with shut eyes and folded hands he mused through the waning hours of that memorable Easter eve.

CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. WALDEMAR, too, had her own little castle in the air, admirably compacted and elegantly put together, though of an entirely different order of architecture to that which Dr. Ellesley was elaborating as he sat *vis-à-vis* with his mother, the dear, failing old lady, who could not be expected very long to watch over his domestic interests. And then of course when she ceased to do it———

Mrs. Waldemar was a clever woman. Not intellectual, by any means. She would instinctively have felt in her pocket for her

smelling-salts if any one had ventured to hint that the course of her reading extended beyond fashionable novels and sweetly-pretty religious books for Sundays; or that she cared to inform herself of the social and moral questions whose solution agitated that country to which she thought her duties were abundantly discharged when she had paid its governmental taxes and given a yearly guinea or two to its benevolent institutions. Mrs. Waldemar had a great horror of intellect. She considered it decidedly unfeminine. She had an idea that to be weak, clinging, affectionate, was the sum-total of womanly excellence; and accordingly she set herself to be weak, clinging, affectionate—or at any rate to make people believe that she was so, though in reality her only weakness was an exquisitely susceptible nervous system; the only object to which she had a capacity

for clinging, her own interest; and her supreme object of idolatry, herself.

Still, she was a clever woman; shrewd, far-seeing, observant; hiding behind those dreamy dark eyes and languid manners and graceful leisurely movements a quick, restless nature, ever on the look-out for ways and means to serve its own purposes, and secure its own ends. If in securing these, the ways and purposes of other people were disappointed, that was of slight importance. As Mr. Waldemar used to say sometimes when he gained for his client a suit which plunged its loser into distress and ruin, one man's food is another man's poison; and with that wise reflection his widow comforted herself when her own interests came into collision with those of some one else, and sunk them.

Also, she was a woman of one purpose—

that purpose being to make herself comfortable. Hitherto she had succeeded tolerably well in her noble endeavour. As is generally the case with selfish, unscrupulous people, she had managed to have her own convenience deferred to, and her own wishes consulted, in preference to the convenience and wishes of others. It is always the most exacting who rules a household. If there happens to be a thoroughly selfish person in any house, that person is invariably the one to whom the comfort of the others yields. The moral of the old-fashioned story-books, which made selfishness its own punishment, and self-denial its own reward, is sadly at fault in the story of modern every-day life, where the pertinacious and consistently-exacting members of society struggle into supremacy, and maintain it over those of gentler, nobler natures, who, for peace

sake, yield to what, if contested, could only produce a divided sovereignty.

Mrs. Waldemar had been the spoiled darling of a small family, the petted youngest daughter, who, on the strength of a pretty face, a better education than her two elder sisters—for their father had risen in the world since his marriage—and an interesting tendency to hysteric affections, consequent upon the least excitement or opposition, had contrived to establish herself as supreme in the household; a supremacy which she transferred to a more elegant and stylish house, when, after some years of scheming, she became the wife of Ralph Waldemar, Esq., and which she was now struggling hard to maintain amidst the conflicting elements of her present position at Percy Cottage. Finding it difficult to maintain, however, in consequence of Miss Hacklebury's

disposition, which had, like her own, a fibre of contentiousness in it, she had resolved to strike out into married life again. Several inducements moved her to this resolve. She had found herself slightly straitened in pecuniary matters since the death of her husband, who, though in a prosperous way of business, had not been able to leave more than a very moderate competency to his widow and daughter. Then she was conscious of a slight diminution of respect on the part of the upper-class people of Carriden-Regis, who, when she drove her own little pony-carriage as the wife of Ralph Waldemar, Esq., bowed to her so very politely, and sought her society so very frequently at their supper and quadrille parties. Finally, there was the supremacy which sister Hacklebury would not yield without a struggle, and which, as sister

Waldemar was determined to have it, made life not always the smoothest of possible things at Percy Cottage.

Considering these disadvantages, Mrs. Waldemar determined to marry again. It was a convenient thing—the best thing that could be done under the circumstances—and so she decided to do it, just as she would have decided to put out a new bay window in her drawing-room, or to lay down a new oil-cloth in the lobby. And having decided that it was to be done, the next thing was to accomplish the doing of it.

Mrs. Waldemar was far too adroit and experienced a woman to have any need for trust in the leadings of Providence. She never attempted to fortify herself against the ills of any situation in which she might be placed by reflecting that the wisdom which had placed her there could, when

the right time came, find means for her removal elsewhere. She had no notion of "waiting for light or guidance," as sister Hacklebury had told her she ought to do, when she talked about removing from Percy Cottage to a more genteel residence. Leading-strings were very well for those who had not wisdom enough to order their own goings, but *she* had long ago learned to dispense with any help they could give. When she found herself where she did not wish to be, she looked round for some more desirable situation, and then, by a series of clever contrivances, worked her way to it. This was how she had managed, fifteen years ago, to become the wife of a well-to-do and rising lawyer, instead of taking up, as her next sister did, with a second-rate merchant's clerk, and shuffling along in obscurity all her days. This was

how she had gradually edged her way also into the best society of Carriden-Regis, judiciously picking up such acquaintances as could help her to a higher standing-place on the social platform, and as judiciously dropping them when the help they could give was no longer needed. And this was how she purposed now to reinstate herself in that dignity from which Mr. Waldemar's death, fifteen months ago, had displaced her.

A most unfortunate thing, that death of Mr. Waldemar's, as she said to sister Hacklebury a few weeks after the funeral. For if he had only kept alive a few years longer, his bachelor uncle, a wealthy and very decrepit old man of eighty, would most likely, in the natural course of events, have dropped off, leaving Mr. Waldemar, as she had always been led to expect, the bulk of

his fortune; which fortune she, as his widow, would have enjoyed, at any rate for her lifetime, whereas now it would pass out of her hands entirely into those of her step-daughter, Meta, who had always been a great favourite with the old man.

However, it was no use rebelling against destiny. That was what Mrs. Waldemar used to say, drooping her dark-fringed eyelids whenever she spoke of "poor dear Mr. Waldemar," though no one rebelled against it more than she did, not so much on account of her estimable partner's death, as for that death taking place just when it did, before the bachelor uncle's wealth had been securely transferred to the Waldemar banking account. The best thing she could do now was to provide him with a successor, and to this end she had thoughts

of cultivating Dr. Ellesley's acquaintance. For he was a *douce*, quiet, manageable, unresisting man, as simple and innocent as a child—the very man, if she had sought the whole world over, whose natural disposition marked him out as a suitable companion for a woman who had been accustomed to rule, and who meant to rule to the end of her life. Then he was so very guileless and unsuspecting. Some men were so wonderfully alert, always on their guard lest anyone should be trying to make an impression upon them; just as if—and Mrs. Waldemar smiled to herself—that made any difference to a really clever woman. But Dr. Ellesley was so very different, so unworldly, so wrapped up in his divinity and logic, and all that sort of thing, that, poor dear man! he would never think of such a thing as marrying, unless some benevo-

lent person like herself reminded him of it. And such a treasure to live with, too! Not a bit of self-will or self-assertion about him, so admirably submissive, so ready to give up his own views, if indeed he ever had any views about anything. The way in which he used to say to old Mrs. Ellesley—"Just as you like, mother," when she proposed anything to him, was a model for men who wished to have everything in their own hands. Mrs. Waldemar had marked him as suitable ever since she heard him say for the first time—

"Just as you like, mother. You know I never interfere with you."

She had determined from that very moment that a man who was so admirably fitted to obey, should not want the opportunity of exercising his vocation.

Already in imagination she beheld herself enthroned as queen-regnant in the handsome suite of rooms set apart for the use of the Governor of Carriden-Regis College, giving orders, suggesting improvements, making alterations; to all of which Dr. Ellesley should simply remark, with that unfailing amiability of his—

"Just as you please, my dear."

Nay, so vividly had this picture of future happiness impressed itself upon her imagination, that when, after the lapse of an hour or two, during which Miss Hacklebury had been napping in her easy chair, she suddenly roused up, and suggested the frying of some omelettes for supper, Mrs. Waldemar, unconsciously repeating the formula which was uppermost in her mind, replied,

"Just as you please, my dear."

Whereat Miss Hacklebury marvelled exceedingly, and thought her sister must be intending to turn over a new leaf.

CHAPTER IX.

MEANWHILE Dr. Ellesley and his mother were enjoying their Saturday evening quiet, after an exceedingly undemonstrative fashion, by the library fireside.

Perhaps you might have gone far to find a more beautiful old lady than Fergus Ellesley's mother, one whose whole outward life told more sweetly of the stedfast, abiding calm within. By birth and descent she was a Churchwoman, but in very early womanhood, being dissatisfied with the ministrations of her spiritual guide, one of the old-fashioned fox-hunting, horse-dealing parsons now happily almost out of date, she

had relinquished her connection with the Establishment, and joined the "society," as it was called, which assembled in a meeting-house just outside the parish.

Like many others, whose creed is a matter of conscientious conviction, she adhered more closely to its outward formulas than those do who simply adopt it from accident of training or early association. She still retained the costume, approaching in its simplicity that of the Quakers, used by the earlier communicants of the Church with which she had so long ago identified herself. Her smooth silvery hair was folded under a close bordered cap of the finest, whitest net. She always wore a black satin dress, of the best material, but the plainest style, made without ornament or decoration of any kind; over this a clear-starched apron of white muslin, and a kerchief of the same, gathered round

her neck, and fastened there, not with a brooch, for that Mrs. Ellesley would have thought inconsistent with scriptural simplicity, but with a very small diamond pin, sole relic of her days of worldly conformity; and even that was carefully hidden amongst the muslin folds, lest by its glitter it should suggest ideas of frivolity and display. Indeed the black satin dress cost her some scruples of conscience, being so very costly and lustrous; but the Doctor's mother belonged to a good family, and she had always been accustomed to the utmost daintiness and nicety, and therefore, try as she might, she could not reconcile her natural refinement of taste to the coarse stuffs which the absolutely orthodox communicants generally adopted. It was well that Paul did not enumerate the wearing of satin dresses amongst those other frivolities of feminine

attire upon which he placed the ban of his disapproval, otherwise Mrs. Ellesley, good woman though she was, would have found it difficult to rule her conduct according to apostolic precepts.

That Dr. and Mrs. Ellesley were mother and son, you might have inferred from the unmistakable family likeness which nature had stamped upon the two faces. A likeness not only of form and feature, but of character shining through these. That gentle loving-kindness which made Mrs. Ellesley so slow to judge, so ready to forgive, was blended with a strength of principle and firmness of self-denial which enabled her, in the bright years of her youth, to put aside the gaieties and allurements of fashionable life, and unite herself, for the sake of religious advancement, with a persecuted and despised sect; a sect, moreover, whose intel-

lectual culture was narrower and more scanty then than it has become since, and in which, however much sustenance she might find for the spiritual part of her nature, little was provided at that time for its more refined, cultivated tastes. It was not a mere amiable, self-indulgent soul which could bind itself to a life like this, and cling to it through sixty years of patient, unwearying consistency. This quiet, steady strength of resolve, scant of words but fruitful in deeds, she had transmitted to her son, and with it also that ingrained gentleness of heart which had written its story in a countenance so beautiful that few could look upon it now, even in its decay, without an almost religious reverence.

Perhaps, too, it was this same firmness and tenacity of purpose, holding the mother through a whole long life-time to the convic-

tions of her youth, which had made Fergus Ellesley so true to his early love; which had wrought it into his nature so fast and firm, that, though the flower of it had long ago fallen, the root was there still, never to be plucked up. Now the sunshine had risen over it, the dews had begun to distil upon it; by-and-by it might blossom fairly as ever, but it would be the old flower still, with the remembered hues of the olden time, and the fragrance which had once made life so sweet.

For it was Agnes that he loved again in Meta Waldemar. It was the soul of Agnes that had looked out upon him through Meta's eyes. Quietly, as though no long distance parted him from it, he took up the former life again, just as he had laid it away after his wife's death; and with it the peace and the content and the infinite calm

of those early days, a calm which most men have overlived long before middle life plants its first wrinkle on their brows. Behind all that bookish seclusion, underneath that shy awkwardness which a lifetime of retirement from the world had gathered upon Fergus Ellesley, there lay a heart pure and simple as the heart of a little child, as quick to feel, as ready to trust, as warm to love.

The years which take from most men their faith in human kindness, which make truth and sincerity like the fairy tales of childhood, a pleasant fiction, an amusing unreality, which teach them to doubt and question and disbelieve the holiest verities of life, had left him unharmed. They had brought him their stores of wisdom and their wealth of experience, but, as the price of these, they had taken none of that simple trustfulness of heart which is a man's most

precious, as it is his rarest possession, and now reverently, thankfully, as, more than twenty years ago, he first took the great gift of his life, he took it again, hoping to rejoice in it even until death.

"Fergus, my dear Fergus."

But Dr. Ellesley did not hear his mother's words. Thoughts of the happy past, so unexpectedly quickened into life; thoughts of the happy future in which that past might be more than given back to him again, had hidden for a time the busy working life which lay between both these.

Mrs. Ellesley looked at him very lovingly. It was his way to be abstracted, especially at times like these, when the day's work was done, and the tired brain that toiled so hard in lecture and class-room, had leave to rest for a little season. It was no uncom-

mon thing for her to speak twice, sometimes thrice, before any answer was given.

She settled herself down again into the old posture of repose, yet with a listening, unquiet air, as though something was going on which ought not to be allowed to go on. Dearly as Mrs. Ellesley loved peace and quietness, she loved order and regularity more dearly still; and her conscientious regard for the rules of the establishment would not let her rest when she fancied that any of them were being infringed.

At last she could bear it no longer. After waiting some minutes to see if the Governor would voluntarily arouse from his reverie, she crossed over to him and laid her hand upon his shoulder.

"Fergus, don't you think the students are making *rather* too much noise?"

This was said with the slightest touch of

hesitation. Dr. Ellesley was supreme in that institution. It was not even his mother's place to hint that his authority was insufficiently exercised. With all his gentleness, Fergus Ellesley had a man's natural dislike to interference, especially when that interference happened to be put forth by a woman. Mrs. Waldemar might be a little mistaken after all when she took the Governor of Carriden-Regis College for a man who could so very easily be managed.

He rose, rather more hastily, perhaps, than was his wont, and as though half ashamed of the reverie in which so much of his time had been passed. Certainly the students were making rather too much noise, considering the lateness of the hour, which was close upon prayer time. Even while he stood listening, as though to assure himself that his interference was really needed, a loud thump,

as of some piece of heavy furniture falling, sounded along the corridor, at the end of which was the common hall, used by the students when not occupied in their respective class-rooms or studies. And thither Dr. Ellesley repaired to institute an inquiry into the state of affairs.

This common hall was a long room on the ground-floor, looking out into the College gardens; covered with India matting, furnished with many tables and benches, and having at one end a large moveable bookcase. Too moveable, for it lay prostrate on the floor now, its contents scattered in glorious confusion far and wide. One or two of the tables had shared in the downfall, and a bust of Plato, given to the Governor by some of his former students, which usually stood on the topmost compartment of the bookcase, was shattered to pieces, its frag-

ments lying amongst Greek plays, Latin orations, and odd volumes of Gibbon's "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire."

Dr. Ellesley's sudden appearance seemed to act like a charm upon the tumultuous students, who had been careering through the room like a pack of schoolboys. However hesitating and embarrassed the Doctor might be when called upon to do the agreeable to fascinating women, or to shield himself from the too liberal bestowal of their preference, there was neither hesitation nor embarrassment in his manner when standing in his own place, and doing his own duty. When he knew what he had to do, Fergus Ellesley could do it as well as any man. He confronted that throng of eager, excited faces with one perfectly calm and dispassionate—one in which there was scarcely even a shade of annoyance, only dignified

inquiry. Some men in his place would have vented a tornado of indignation, so exchanging one sort of disorder for another; but it was rarely that Dr. Ellesley wasted words when silence would serve as well. The secret of his great power over those beneath him lay in his perfect self-control. Those who knew him best, and had been with him in the most irritating circumstances, had never seen him fail in a certain quiet, collected gravity of manner. He was always master of his temper, not only on great occasions, but in those thousand and one little daily recurring annoyances which often try a man's patience, and conquer it too, when he has proved victorious in the greater strife.

"Gentlemen, you will have the goodness to tell me who has been the cause of this disorder."

And Dr. Ellesley's tones, as he said this, were as calm as though he had been giving the students a prelection on Natural Theology.

Immediately there was a chorus of eager voices upraised, some in explanation, some in defence, some in self-exculpation. Amongst them was one louder than the others.

"Garton did it, sir. He had hold of the top panel, and pulled it down. He was saying he could lift a heavier weight than any of us, and we dared him to do it."

The speaker was a handsome, fashionable-looking young man, one of the lay students, with the easy, nonchalant bearing of a gentleman about him. Although his features did not indicate great force of intellect, he seemed to have influence of some sort amongst his fellow-students, for when he spoke they were silent, no one offering

any contradiction to the statement he had made.

Dr. Ellesley scanned the group until his eye rested on a young man, neither handsome nor fashionable-looking, who was lifting the book-case, and replacing its scattered contents.

"Mr. Garton, have you any other explanation to offer of this disturbance? You will oblige me by leaving the books where they are. One of the wardens will come in and repair the mischief you have caused. At least," the Doctor continued, with a glance towards the shattered Plato, "so far as it can be repaired."

Apparently Mr. Garton had no other explanation to offer. He left the books as they were, and without a single word of defence or apology, went out of the hall. Only, as he carelessly forced his way through

the other students, and almost struck against Dr. Ellesley in passing him, there was a sort of quiet defiance in his manner, and even a concealed contempt lurking about his firmly-shut lips, which, if either of them was directed towards the Governor of the College, must be considered a most unwarrantable and unseemly manifestation. Mr. Garton was anything but a pleasant person to do with. Nay, perhaps he might have been singled out by more than a mere surface observer of character as a student likely to make mischief in the place—a fomenter of ill-feeling and sedition. That look told of will and purpose enough, if only he chose to exercise it; will and purpose which, working in the wrong direction, might cause the quiet Governor a vast amount of trouble before long.

Dr. Ellesley summoned one of the wardens

to lift the bookcase into its place and restore the room to something like order. Rodney Charnock, the fashionable young man, sprang forward with bright smile and ready hand to help him. Rodney was rather a favourite with most of the students and professors too. He was never backward in coming forward with any little attention which did not cost him much trouble. He had a fine flow of small talk and compliment. He would be a first-class drawing-room man when the termination of his college course gave him leisure to cultivate his taste for polite society. Whether he would ever develop into anything worth calling a real true man, was quite another question, one which as yet he had not taken seriously into consideration.

"Gentlemen, I will thank you to be more orderly during the remainder of the evening."

And with that, Dr. Ellesley looked round on the brood of young collegians. A calm, authoritative look, which seemed to say—

"You know what you have to do. Do it."

It was a look which rarely failed to produce the desired effect, although in producing that effect it might rather remove the Governor from the sympathies of his students. But Fergus Ellesley was a man who, if he ruled at all, must rule by the overmastering force of his own self-control, and not by sympathy with the natures which he had to manage. He was far too shy, perhaps also too proud, to reveal to them his real disposition, with all its latent wealth of love and kindliness, and so win them by affection for himself rather than by respect for his position. He was not the man either to request as a favour what his office de-

manded as a right; to ask them out of consideration for himself, or any feeling of his, to abstain from that which was in itself a violation of rule.

Perhaps another man would have tried to manage these hobbledehoy students as foolish mothers try to manage their children, by thrusting forth their own little preferences and feelings, instead of the unalterable laws of right and wrong. "My child, that is annoying to *me*, and therefore you must not do it; it inconveniences *myself*, and therefore is wrong." Dr. Ellesley took higher ground. "Gentlemen, this is contrary to rule, and therefore must not be repeated."

"All right, old fogie," said Mr. Rodney Charnock, with a nod and a wink towards the departing figure of the Governor. But as the students were too much engaged in

discussing the transaction which had just taken place, to notice this little bit of unseemliness, and as Dr. Ellesley was not in a position to observe it, perhaps it did no one so much harm as the perpetrator.

"Well, Fergus," said Mrs. Ellesley, when after the lapse of half an hour her son came back to the library, "what was it all about?"

"Only young Garton. He knocked down the bookcase in the common hall, and my bust of Plato that the students gave me is smashed. I have cautioned the lads once or twice against playing their pranks at that end of the room, so that it can scarcely be looked upon in the light of an accident. I don't care so much for the loss of the bust, though, but there was an expression in Garton's face, as he almost pushed past me to go out of the room, when I had spoken to

him about the disturbance, which vexed me a good deal."

"I am very sorry, Fergus. And Stephen Garton, too!"

"Yes, that is just the thing I am so sorry about. I would not have minded it from most of the other students. But I did not think Garton would have given me a look like that."

Dr. Ellesley said no more about it. He took his seat by the fire, but his reverie had been too rudely broken in upon, and the pleasant thoughts would not weave themselves together any more. Though he never complained to any one, the Governor's was a weary life sometimes. The incessant jarring of crude, half-formed natures against his own, so genial and sensitive, was now and then more than he could bear in peace. No one knew how much of real pain lay

beneath the unvarying patience with which he would leave the quiet of his study to quell some trifling outbreak like this amongst the students, or to smooth down their little quarrels, and prevent the risings of strife and rebellion. His was a nature that greatly valued peace. It was a real grief to him to feel himself placed in antagonism with anyone. Even Mrs. Ellesley, who knew him best, little thought sometimes with what an effort he held fast that calm grave bearing of his, or how heavily the rule which he kept over others pressed upon himself. But she was a quiet-hearted woman. There had been but little unrest in her own life—she had seen little in his. He had reached that rarest length of self-denial which will not even tell of suffering, lest the telling should wound. He chose to take quietly all of

pain or incompleteness that his life might hold, and so quietly he took it that no one knew it was there.

CHAPTER X.

SOON after that the bell rang for prayers. Then the warden, as was his custom, turned off the lights in the public rooms, and the students betook themselves to the little dens which lined each side of the long corridor upstairs. An hour later scarce any sign of waking life was to be seen, save one solitary light flickering through the window of the room where Stephen Garton was accustomed to pore over his books until long past midnight.

This room was very scantily furnished, presenting a strange contrast to some of its neighbours, which were crowded with all

the little comforts that taste or luxury could devise. There was no carpet to the floor, no curtain to the window. The bookshelves, filled with evidently second-hand books in battered bindings, were of the plainest deal. There were no elegantly-framed pictures of theatrical celebrities, nymphs, belles, shepherdesses, or classic beauties to be seen in it, such as adorned the walls of Rodney Charnock's superb little sanctum a few doors further on. No costly liqueur glasses either, no elaborate meerschaums and embroidered cigar-cases, thrust into obscure corners, or ostentatiously displayed, told of expensive habits on the part of their owner. You might have pulled open the painted cupboard door, too, without finding behind it anything which indicated a love of after-dinner bibulations. No miniature regiments of Bass's pale ale, or flasks of cognac, or

bottles of crusted port, or silver-labelled phials of mountain dew. Instead, you would only have found more books and papers, piles of class-room exercises, written in a black, rather untidy hand, and a basketful of worsted, tapes, and buttons; betraying the somewhat humiliating fact that Stephen Garton was dependent upon his own industry for the orderly maintenance of his wardrobe, being most likely too poor to afford the weekly shilling which Mrs. Beamish, the under matron, exacted from those whose linen she kept in a state of becoming propriety.

The only piece of needless ornament in the room, excepting, perhaps, a landscape picture cut out of a stray number of the *Illustrated News*, and pasted on a piece of cardboard over the mantelshelf, was a little white vase, value sixpence, or thereabouts, in which a few primroses and a spray of

olive-tinted sycamore leaves were grouped together, not without a certain artistic taste. Simple as the decoration was, it seemed to invest that meagre room with an air of refinement such as the costliest crystal or bronze might have failed to give; such as all Rodney Charnock's Parisian nymphs and Greek goddesses in water-colour and chromo-lithograph could not bring into that expensively-furnished studio of his, where so much of smoking and so little of anything else was done.

Stephen Garton himself, the present occupant of Number Ten, the student who had been reprimanded for misconduct in the common hall, was sitting at the table now, working away at a Latin theme, with a pair of black calico sleeves drawn over his arms, just so far as they needed to rest on the deal desk before him. The sleeves were

cheaper, and more respectable, too, than having his coat patched at the elbows, or suffering it to go threadbare, one of which alternatives, without this economical contrivance, he must have accepted; for new coats with Stephen Garton were by no means frequently recurring luxuries. A man perhaps might not have noticed any peculiarities in the minor details of his toilet, but if a close feminine observer had criticised his neck-tie, she would very speedily have discovered that it had been turned inside out, and ends into the middle, to make it look decent for a few months longer; and a further investigation would have revealed that the little bit of collar which was folded down over it, though white enough, was of the extremest degree of coarseness consistent with respectability.

You are not expected to bow down and

worship Stephen Garton because he could go through the world without those little niceties of dress and adornment which most young men think indispensable. Neither are you to imagine that he was some incipient Anglo-Catholic graduate, who, from the Simeon Stylites column of a self-imposed asceticism could afford to look with holy contempt on such frivolities as comfortably-furnished rooms, and costly cigar-cases, and well-stocked cupboards; since in that case he would certainly not have selected the Dissenting college of Carriden-Regis for the display of his peculiarities. But perhaps you may not respect him the less when you know that every shilling which he spent upon himself took away some trifling domestic comfort from a poor widowed old woman, his mother, who lived in a two-roomed cottage in one of the small back

streets of Millsmany. A very pious old woman, who had seen better days, but who having married a vicious spendthrift of a husband, had gradually sunk, step by step, from decent competence into absolute poverty; until now, when having toiled and slaved and suffered thirty years for her lord and master, she had buried him in the poor people's corner of Millsmany parish church, and was toiling and slaving almost as hard as ever, that her only boy, Stephen, who had always been a steady, honest lad, might get into the ministry, and be the means of doing some good in the world. Which good, more than any exalted social position, or possible support for herself in her old age, was what Mrs. Garton had been longing and praying for ever since Steve got so kindly treated by the head-master of the Millsmany school.

True, he was not a very great expense to her, not nearly so much so as the man who, thirty years ago, had sworn to cherish and keep her so long as they both should live. For every hour that Stephen could spare from his college work, he spent in giving private lessons either at Millsmany or Carriden-Regis; and he had gained one or two prizes since he went to college, which had helped him on a little. But all that he could earn barely sufficed for his board and college fees, to say nothing of keeping up a respectable appearance amongst his fellow-students, and purchasing the books which were absolutely needful for getting up his exercises and examinations. So that the few shillings a fortnight which, after the rent was paid, and the current expenses were met, old Mrs. Garton could lay aside from the profits of clear-starching and

lace-washing, came in very acceptably to supplement the deficiencies of Stephen's private purse. And whilst he took them thankfully enough, hoping some day to repay them with interest, there would have been little manliness in him could he, for needless show or self-indulgence, have wasted a single penny of them.

You have learned now the chief facts relative to the poor divinity student's birth and belongings, and how it came to pass that his black silk neckties were turned inside out, and his linen waistbands hemmed down from time to time to put off the expense of new ones; and why Mrs. Beamish, the under matron, never got anything out of him for new tapes and buttons; and why the sole decorations of his studying apartment in Carriden-Regis College consisted of a sixpenny jug to put

primroses in, and a wood engraving cut out of an old illustrated paper, given him by some good-natured mate who discovered that the young man had a taste for natural beauty. Stephen himself would not dislike you any more for knowing all about him. He never tried to make himself or his connections appear better than they really were.

True, he never thrust them into public notice, as professional beggars do their wounds, hoping thereby to gain a few stray coppers, or a lift on the road; but as little did he hide them, and seek to trade in interest and friendship with false capital. Always, when the more thoughtful students, drawn towards him by his steadiness and talent, sought his help in their work, and from that went on to overtures of companionship and confidence, Stephen told them

bravely and straightforwardly who and what he was, to what layer of the social strata he belonged, what barriers of rank and caste lay between themselves and him; lest in days to come these things should be dragged out against him, and he should lose far more in honest self-respect than he had seemed to gain in brilliant friendship. After that, if they chose to take him for what he was, well and good. There was nothing more to be found out, nothing to be afraid of.

It is but just to the students to say, that, for the most part, they treated Stephen Garton with that courtesy which an honest man, whatever his station, however mean his origin, however great the disadvantages he has striven with, has a right to demand, and may generally win. A few tried to patronize him, but that was

very soon dropped. Stephen Garton was not a young man that could be patronized. Others, such as Rodney Charnock, snubbed him at convenient opportunities, and talked largely of their high family and good descent when they knew he was within hearing. Those, however, whose respect was worth much, gave it to him, and felt that in giving it they suffered no loss.

So that on the whole Stephen's college life was tolerably pleasant, although, not being able to return suppers and wine-parties, he never went to them; and although that little den of his was pitifully destitute of even the most ordinary comforts of a student's workshop. How he fared in it, and how the work which he did there told in after life, we shall learn as the years go on.

CHAPTER XI.

BEFORE Dr. Ellesley came to the new College at Carriden-Regis, he was, as we have already seen, head master of a great public school at Millsmany. And this was how it fell out that he knew Stephen Garton, and learned to think of him as we may gather he did think, from the grieved look which came upon his face when he thought the young man had been wilfully setting him at defiance. For Dr. Ellesley was not a man to be grieved, still less manifest it by word or look, unless his heart was stirred with real interest for the offender. Ordinary people might vex and an-

noy and worry him, he could forget that and pass it over; but only those between whom and himself much more than mere kindliness had passed, could grieve the meek, quiet, forbearing Governor of Carriden-Regis College.

The great school at Millsmany was divided into three compartments, upper, middle, and lower, the last of which stooped to the needs of almost the poorest operative class in that busy town. It was into this lower department—taught chiefly by masters in training for the country schools—that Stephen Garton came, an uncouth lad, nine or ten years of age. He was plain almost to ugliness; indeed, as he broadened into manhood, that trifling peculiarity did not quite pass away—rough, silent, and not remarkably brilliant, so the masters thought, in his capacity for learning. Indeed, it was more a

sort of dogged perseverance, they used to remark one to another, which got him forward at all, than any natural brightness or vivacity. He was very slow at learning anything by heart, was seldom ready with an answer to the *viva voce* examinations by which the greater part of the lower-school teaching was carried on, and only passed creditably in written exercises where quickness and readiness were not required, but thought, and quiet, resolute study.

He had been in the school for more than a year, working very hard, attending with praiseworthy regularity, seldom committing himself by any serious fault, but, in consequence of his want of readiness, not taking a very high position amongst the rest of the boys, when a little incident occurred which changed the whole current of his life.

The yearly examination was coming on.

The boy who came off best in it was entitled to a trifling scholarship, the possession of which passed him into the special charge of one of the masters, thence into the middle-school, free of expense, and from that to the training institution; from which, if he retained his good character, he was sent out as master into some provincial school, and so secured a comfortable position for life. Out of the entire number of boys the masters had fixed upon about a dozen, to one of whom this prize would most likely fall; and of this dozen, Stephen Garton and another boy, the son of very poor and dissipated parents, appeared still more narrowly to divide the chances of success between them.

Only a few days before the awarding of this scholarship, a flagrant breach of discipline was committed in the school. After a

proper amount of investigation by the lower masters, who were responsible for any irregularities amongst their pupils, it was traced to Stephen Garton; proved against him. He got an imposition, so many pages of history to repeat by heart—the most difficult task that could have been set to a lad like him—and the privilege of competing in the examination was taken from him.

He received both penalties without a murmur—Stephen's slowness of speech went further than *viva voce* lessons—and laboured on day after day at his imposition until he was able to repeat it without a mistake. Before he had mastered it the examination took place, and the boy who, along with himself, had been singled out as likely to be successful, won the coveted scholarship, with all its attendant advantages.

This lad's name was Nolans. He was a

sharp, clever boy; quick, bright, intelligent, not so much to be depended on as Stephen for accuracy and thoughtfulness, but far before him in those qualities which often serve a lad better. The masters noticed that after the awarding of the scholarship Nolans and his discomfited rival avoided each other as much as possible, never exchanging books, or learning their lessons together, as they used to do whilst it was still uncertain which of them would be successful. But this they thought was natural enough; for Stephen, with all his poverty and dulness, was a very proud lad, and the humiliation of being found out in a fault, to say nothing of the attendant loss of the scholarship, was enough to make him shrink away from the boy who had overpassed him. They fancied, too, from his increased reserve and almost sullenness after Nolans's

success, that he was meditating some plan of revenge. These slow, dogged lads, they had observed, often had great power of mischief and craftiness hidden away beneath their silence.

So weeks passed on, weeks and months, Stephen still plodding away in the lower school, his successful rival working on by degrees to the middle department, after which he was to go into the training institution, and become a country schoolmaster, the very thing Stephen had set his heart upon ever since he knew about the scholarship, and began to wonder if there was a chance of his getting it. His mother, toiling at her clear starching in that poor cottage at the bottom of one of the back streets of Millsmany, sitting up night after night for a drunken husband, sorely perplexed sometimes to scrape together the week's pence,

which paid for her lad's schooling, knew that he had been working hard for this examination, and great was her disappointment, not unmixed with a little bitterness of rebuke, when she heard that he was turned back for worse than inability—for misbehaviour and rebellion.

"Steve, lad," she used to say, and her poor tear-dimmed eyes had a look in them which made Stephen bite his lips till the blood came, just to keep back his own tears—it was not a look of anger, but so sad and hopeless—"Steve, lad, I thought thee was going to make a man of theeself, and not bother thy poor old mother any more. If thee knowed, lad, how sore I've oft been putten to it to keep thee along at school, and father drinking his wage afore it's earned, thee wouldn't ha' served me so. I didn't think it of thee, lad."

still, as he was going away from the town with his father and mother in search of employment, he was no longer afraid of the culprit's vengeance, in case the truth was brought to light. However that might be, he went and told the master of the lower school all about it, adding that Nolans had given him twopence a week to keep the secret ever since just before the examination. This latter confession, taking into account that the little urchin was going to leave school directly, and would therefore be out of reach of unpleasant consequences, rather spoiled the nobility of the explanation, so far as he was personally concerned; but as the subject had been brought up in such a manner, the master was obliged to inquire into it again; and accordingly he had the two boys, Nolans and Garton, summoned to give an account of themselves.

Stephen resolutely refused to say anything about it, or to inculpate the lad who was making his way so steadily through the lower school.

"I don't want to say," was all that could be got out of him, when, in presence of the assembled school, he and Nolans were confronted with each other, and bidden to declare the whole truth. And that he meant what he said, was evident from his thoroughly quiet, resolute manner.

There was nothing for it, then, but to send him to the head-master, Dr. Ellesley, who, perhaps understanding the boy's character better than the other teachers, took him into his own private room, and after a few kind, assuring words, won from him the real facts of the case; that he had been guiltless of the fault laid against him, and that he had for all these months been bear-

ing a punishment which of right belonged to his successful antagonist.

"But you should have told this," said Dr. Ellesley, "when the other masters asked you."

There was a gleam of pride and independence in Stephen Garton's eyes as he drew himself up, and looked Dr. Ellesley full in the face. No little lord or duke with ten centuries of splendid descent behind him could have said more loftily than this washerwoman's son said it—

"They had no right to make me tell. I'd done all they set me to, and I'd borne all there was to bear, and I'd paid for the right to hold my tongue, and I wasn't going to say who did it. And I wouldn't ha' telled you now if you hadn't promised me first that you wouldn't bring it up again him."

"But, my lad, why did you do it for him?" asked the Doctor, now for the first time feeling what a truly noble nature this was, struggling up through all the tyranny of toil and hardship. "Why did you do it, my poor lad?"

Stephen's head was not thrown proudly back this time. It hung low enough as he replied, still in that rude, untutored speech of his—

"His father and mother were bad ones, both of 'em, and they wouldn't help him on, and I thought he wanted it more nor me."

Then, overpowered partly by the excitement of speaking about that which had indeed cost him so much desperate self-denial and endurance, and partly by the humiliation—for to him it seemed such—of having to drag out his private thoughts before a stranger, the lad burst into a passionate fit

of crying. If there were tears in the Doctor's eyes too, they were such as no man need be ashamed of.

Stephen Garton went no more into the lower school after that. Dr. Ellesley took him under his own charge, and directed his studies amongst the middle-class boys, whom he soon outstripped, for he began to feel now that he had a friend, and that he might make a man of himself, after all. In winter evenings, when the rest of the school was dismissed, the Doctor used to give him lessons in Latin, and by-and-by he made him a teacher in the lower school, that he might not feel himself quite dependent on charity for the education he was receiving. Stephen, even in his early youth, was far too proud to take as a gift that for which by any possible toil and industry he might make some adequate return.

After Dr. Ellesley was appointed Governor of the new college at Carriden-Regis, he still kept his eye on poor Phebe Garton's son. Discerning in him that which might be cultivated to some purpose, and make the lad an influence for good in the world, he offered him, after he had been some years in the school at Millsmany, a place amongst the students, part of the needful fees to be paid as he went along, and part afterwards, when he should be in a position to render himself independent.

That was a grand lift for Stephen Garton. A new life opened to him now, and the sweetest hope of it was that before long he might be able to pay back in an old age of peaceful content all the weary toil which in bygone years his mother had suffered for him. True, he had still to take from her month by month the little store

which she earned so hardly. With all his care and saving—with all the time, too, which he spent in private teaching amongst the families to which Dr. Ellesley, knowing his thoroughness and patience, had introduced him, he was not able as yet to earn more than paid for his board and lodging in the college. For class fees and all other expenses he was dependent on his mother and Dr. Ellesley. That was just the one little streak of bitterness in a life which would otherwise have been so much more successful than a few years ago he even dared to hope. He was partly living on charity still. Toil as he would, he was obliged to take more out of the world than he put into it. All his labour and all his self-denial did not give him the right to be independent.

But this was only for a little while. After-

wards he would find his own place, have leave to work, not only for himself, but for others too; leave to help as he was being helped now; leave to pay back to some poor struggling one like himself what in his own need had been so generously given, and smooth the upward path of honest toil to some weary traveller who might find it, even as it had been for himself, rough and painful. He might well be content to wait a little while to win so much as that.

But he hoped to win still more. For sometimes Stephen Garton's thoughts used to drift away into a happy future, wherein that which the best men are content to labour and wait and strive for, the love of some gentle-hearted woman, might be given him. He, too, though fighting hard with poverty, sorely pressed down by that weight of low descent, ignoble birth, with all its

attendant disadvantages and humiliations, had his own dreams of what life might be when these things had been striven with and conquered. He had his ideal of womanly beauty, though as yet that unbreathing ideal had never descended, Hermione-like, from her pedestal, to quicken all his pulses with her warm, sweet, human touch. Sometimes, sitting amongst his books, in that barely-furnished little chamber, spent with toil of brain, or vexed with some chance words of contempt which his humble appearance and threadbare garb had brought upon him from the more wealthy, fashionable students, he would try to forget these things in a dream of what life might be. He would shut his eyes, and overpassing the next few years, picture as his own such a home as any honest man, with a willing heart and a strong right hand, may some day win for

himself; a home into which no trouble that thought or care of his might keep away should ever enter; and this not for his own sake, but for hers, the faithful loving woman, whoever she might be, waiting now somewhere in the world for him, who should make that home a little sanctuary; whose smile should be all the reward he needed for toil and endeavour and self-denial; whose pride in him—for he felt that some one would be proud of him some day—should be better than all the world's loud praise; and having whose steadfast confidence, he could brave all doubt and difficulty and disappointment, should these still vex his path.

Waking from such dreams as these, he looked upon the blank walls of his little room in Carriden-Regis College, the humble belongings of his daily life, the worn, bat-

tered, second-hand books, the deal table, the halfpenny candle sputtering in its leaden stick, the ink-stained calico sleeves with which he was endeavouring to prolong the respectability of an already threadbare and worn-out coat. Then he thought of his mother toiling for him in that back street, counting over the hard-earned sixpences which might help to keep him decent amongst his fellow-students. He pictured her sitting down to her scant meal, bending over her almost fireless grate, shivering in old garments far more threadbare and out-worn than his own, that she might be able to help him in his need, that he might not have to give up, now that so much had been conquered, and fall back again to the ranks of humble working life from which he had struggled so painfully. And he almost despised himself for daring to think of his own life

cheered by any woman's love, until hers had been redeemed from its poverty, and sweetened by all the tenderness and all the comfort which he, for whom she had borne the loss of so much, could put into it. Not until he had placed her where he himself hoped some day to stand, away from anxious fretting care for daily bread and daily comfort, would he seek for his own life's sunshine, or ask for rest from the toil which she had borne so patiently for his sake. And how far away the time seemed when he should be able to do this!

But never mind. Men had struggled through worse difficulties than any which hedged him round, to all the best rewards of life. Many a ladder whose topmost step led to fame and honour, had been planted on a meaner foundation than that from which he was now trying to lift himself.

He felt the power within him, he felt the will. Between what he was now and what he was when he began life as a little ignorant lad in the school at Millsmany, there had been enough of toil and striving and success, to bid him take courage for the future. If the next ten years of his life set him as bravely forward, and gave him as many battles gained as these which lay behind him had done, he should not need, when they were over, to shut his eyes for sight of that picture of home, love and peace, which was his fair ideal now.

CHAPTER XII.

SUCH was Stephen Garton's history up to this night on which we have seen him incur the Governor's displeasure for contempt of rules. The very last student, certainly, who ought to have come under reprimand for that sort of thing. Indeed, he may well look so black and lowering as he sits in front of his deal table, scanning Latin verse by the help of a half-penny dip. At least, pretending to scan it, for though he has been sitting there for a couple of hours, ever since that commotion downstairs in the students' hall, he has not turned over a single leaf, nor even so much

as reached out his hand to snuff the half-penny dip, which will soon reward his neglect by subsiding with a splutter into its small remnant of tallow, and leaving him in darkness for the remainder of his meditations.

To tell the truth, these meditations were anything but sweet unto him. He was far too reserved and proud to speak to the Governor about it, but that look of quiet defiance which had grieved Dr. Ellesley so much was not intended for that worthy man at all, nor had it any connection with the previous reprimand, galling though that reprimand had been to a youth of Stephen's temperament. He could have taken a great deal more than that from Dr. Ellesley, and taken it patiently too, so only he felt that he deserved it; nay, he could even have had a queer sort of pleasure in bearing

his punishment, and suffering tenfold for any wrong that he had done, if that suffering could have brought back again the old, bright, friendly feeling between himself and the one he had seemed to have wronged.

But it was not Stephen Garton who had smashed the Governor's Plato, and produced such a commotion in the common hall. Rodney Charnock, the fashionable young collegian had been at the bottom of the mischief, and it was only because Stephen was too haughty to condescend to self-defence that he had taken upon himself the disgrace due to another, and thus saved the other from punishment.

At any rate, that was what Stephen said to himself, as soon as the glow of anger and indignation which the young man's meanness produced had died away, sufficient-

ly for him to review the affair with anything like quietness. But a nobler motive prompted him to act as he did. Rodney Charnock had been pulled up two or three times for contempt of discipline. If that sort of thing happened again, it might go hard with him in the college course, and especially in his competition for the Burton prize, which was to be awarded during the ensuing autumn.

Stephen, certainly, was standing by the bookcase, trying to get a book which none of the others could reach, but it was Charnock who was daring the rest as to which of them could put out most strength; and it was his nonsense which had done the mischief, though from the place where Stephen stood when Dr. Ellesley came into the room, he appeared to be the chief actor in it.

Such a feeling of scorn went through him

as Charnock, in that easy plausible way of his, threw the blame from himself, not caring upon whom it fell, so long as he was safe. And yet a certain overmastering benevolence, which after all was the ruling power of Stephen's character, restrained him, even more than his pride, from lawful self-defence. Because, had he told the truth, had he at once rolled the blame back upon its proper owner, his fellow-student would have been convicted, not only of disorder, but of deceit and falsehood, which would have brought upon him a far heavier punishment.

It was something like a re-acting, upon a larger scale, of that school-boy drama, played out and done with, ten years ago. The pride, and honour, and self-denying benevolence which stirred in the heart of that poor little Millsmany boy had grown with

his growth, and strengthened with his strength. Too proud still to defend himself, too honourable to betray even an enemy, too benevolent to stand by and see that enemy bearing the suffering which yet he had rightfully earned—the boy was true father of the man.

Only in this case virtue was not bringing its own reward, as the copy-books—those universally accepted depositories of sound moral and ethical teaching—say it always does. The lowering look on Stephen's face told plainly enough that he was reaping no harvest of self-complacency from a survey of the heroic manner in which he had given up his own interests for those of another. So did the impatient, fidgeting way in which he thrust his fingers through his hair from time to time, and the almost vicious energy with which he occasionally dug his

steel pen into the desk before him, to the extreme peril of its after usefulness. Evidently something was vexing him. There was some pent-up irritability which wanted to find its way out and could not.

Judging from appearances, Stephen Garton was not feeling at all like the good little boys and model young men one reads of in biographical sketches, who, having fulfilled their duty to their neighbours, according to the somewhat stringent rules of the Shorter Catechism, and made their own private feelings a macadamised footpath for those of others, receive, as compensation for such exceptional self-denial, the sugar-plum of an approving conscience, and retire from their accomplished sacrifice strong in the consciousness of moral heroism, having perhaps a slight share of the sensations experienced by little Jack Horner when he

sat in that memorable corner eating his Christmas pie. Stephen was by no means saying to himself—

"What a great boy am I!"

as he reviewed the transaction which had just taken place in the common hall. Indeed, he was disposed to look upon himself in quite a different light, to take his place amongst very small boys, boys who have not the ability to accomplish anything heroic, however much they may long to do it, after the Master Horner fashion. Because, though he had taken the rebuke which belonged to another, so sheltering that other from a worse punishment, yet he felt in his heart of hearts vexed with himself for the very benevolence which had made him willing to do it. Instead of being conscious of a boundless complacency towards the world in general, and Rodney Charnock in

particular, he felt as if he should very much like to dig into his young fellow-collegian as he was digging into his own deal table now, with that sharp steel pen; as if he wanted to expose him before the whole college, to show him up for what he was, a mean, time-serving, pitiful fraction of a man, willing to criminate anyone so long as he himself might skulk away out of reach of harm; willing to see even the innocent suffer, if by their suffering he could lounge along himself in ignominious ease. That was just what Stephen Garton wanted to do to Rodney Charnock; and he was downright vexed with himself, not because he wanted to do it, but because a certain goodness of heart, which he could not control or put out of his way, kept him from following the bent of his inclinations.

He was always making a simpleton of

would not have parted between Stephen and Dr. Ellesley as he felt that look had done.

Dr. Ellesley, the man who had been so kind to him, who had brought him out of poverty and obscurity, and given him the opportunity of getting on in life; whose good opinion he most of all cared for, for whose sake he could have given up almost anything. Yet he could not go and explain this to him, because if he did, a brainless young aristocrat would come to grief thereby; a young fellow who was always boasting of his good family and high descent, and making all sorts of unmanly side-thrusts at the charity student, the "washerwoman's brat," as he had overheard Charnock calling him one night in the common hall. A man whom he counted his enemy.

Ah! that was the very reason he could

not go and show him up before the Governor, and set himself straight. If it had been another of the students who had wronged him so, one towards whom he felt perfect indifference, he might have done violence to his kindly feelings and claimed justice for himself, even though the offender had suffered for it. But Rodney Charnock was his enemy, and the Book said—"If thy enemy hunger, feed him."

Would he be acting in the spirit of that command if he cast up the young man's fault against him, and caused him to lose his good name amongst the rest of the students; convicted him of deceit and meanness, and stamped him as unworthy the good descent of which he so greatly boasted? Could he do that, and then say with any sort of sincerity—

"Forgive us our trespasses, for we also

CHAPTER XIII.

BUT we have had enough for a time of the ways and doings of Carriden-Regis college, the sort of life that was lived there, the pleasant hopes that were just beginning to dawn, like the red streaks of coming sunrise, upon Dr. Ellesley's hitherto monotonous twilight of studious seclusion; and the vexing cares and anxieties, the petty slights of aristocratic pride, the stings consequent upon poverty, all of which had to be borne by the sufferers thereof with such patience as they could command. So leaving Stephen Garton to plunge into Latin verse again by the light of his halfpenny dip—

for he, too, is intending to compete for this famous Burton prize—and leaving the Governor to resume his reverie again, if he can, where he left it when that upstir began in the common hall, we will return to Percy Cottage, where Meta Waldemar is unpacking her portmanteau, thinking, perhaps, as she does so, of the very quiet man who brought her and it from the Millsmany station. Meta has met few strangers during her secluded life with that old aunt in the south, and she has a way of reflecting rather closely upon fresh people, representing them to herself as they first impressed her, forming her own little private theories about them, and settling with herself whether she shall be able to like them or not. The only conclusion she can come to about her recent companion, however, is, that he possesses a sort of negative pleasantness,

borough, the steward, were within a stone's throw of Percy Cottage, and Mrs. Danesborough spent the whole of her afternoons, when she was not gossiping amongst her neighbours, in peeping behind the curtains of her front windows, with a view to finding out who called at the principal houses. Mrs. Waldemar believed she had seen her peeping behind the Venetian blinds that very evening, when she went out into the hall to welcome dear Meta and the Doctor, and she had not the slightest doubt that she should hear more about it before long; perhaps be rallied on the Doctor's attentiveness, which, in the present state of affairs, would be a most annoying thing, because if it came round to his hearing, he was just the sort of man that would shrink away into himself, and perhaps never come near the house again. Nothing had a worse effect

upon shy, sensitive men like the Doctor, than to be rallied about anything of that sort prematurely.

Not, Mrs. Waldemar said, that such a termination of the matter would at all grieve Mrs. Danesborough. She knew very well that the steward's wife was a thoroughly mischief-making woman, a woman who enjoyed nothing so much as spoiling any little arrangement which seemed to advance the interests of her friends in a temporal point of view. Mrs. Waldemar really did believe that if Mrs. Danesborough rejoiced in anything, it was the discomfiture of people who were a little above herself in social rank. It was evidently such a great satisfaction to her when poor dear Mr. Waldemar was removed, and she, Mrs. Waldemar, was obliged to lay down that sweet pretty little pony carriage, which had always been such an

object of envy to the steward's wife. And she ventured to say that if the carriage could have been had for love or money in Carriden-Regis, Mrs. Danesborough would have persuaded her husband to buy it, just that she might have the satisfaction of driving it past Percy Cottage a dozen times a day. Such pitiful meanness. But Mrs. Waldemar had had it sold in Millsmany, and by private contract, too, for the very reason that Mrs. Danesborough should not get hold of it. She had no patience with that sort of spirit which rejoiced in the downfall of another. And she was quite sure now, that if Mrs. Danesborough had the slightest idea of Dr. Ellesley's attentions, she would never rest until she had managed to make some unpleasantness between them, or put about such ill-natured remarks as would seriously interfere with any little plans which

she, Mrs. Waldemar, might have been able to carry out, if only other people would let her alone.

But of course this visit could so easily be accounted for, even if Mrs. Danesborough did venture upon anything like pleasantry. It was the most natural thing in the world that Mrs. Ellesley, dear kind old lady, knowing how awkwardly she was sometimes fixed, now that the pony carriage had been laid down, should have proposed Meta's coming home with the Doctor, in which case it was only what the merest politeness required that he should be invited to stay to tea, and rest himself after the long, cold drive. No one certainly could gossip about such a simple thing as that, or attach any sort of importance to it; whilst at the same time it would answer her purpose as com-

pletely as the most elaborate and formal invitation could have done.

And then for Dorothy Ann to break up everything with that stupid speech about Sabbath preparations. Just as if an hour or two of really cultivated, refined society, such as she flattered herself her own might be considered, was not the very best preparation a minister could possibly have for his pulpit duties. And now the opportunity had gone—slipped through her fingers entirely, unless the Doctor, as was only consistent with politeness, should call again in the course of a day or two, to inquire after Meta. Not of course that Meta could be of any consequence to a man like him—nothing of the sort; but still the attention would be the same. And if he *had* regretted not being able to stay and spend the evening with them, as Mrs. Waldemar almost fancied,

from a slight hesitation in his manner, he had; and if it had only been in consequence of a natural shyness that he shrank from encountering the society of ladies, not being accustomed in a general way to that sort of thing, then he might easily make the excuse of riding over and perhaps spending a quiet evening with them.

Mrs. Waldemar thought he would. He had appeared so very undecided whether to go or stay, until Dorothy Ann settled it all by that abrupt speech of hers, drove him, as she might almost express it, out of the room, when a single word, spoken in the other direction, would have kept him there. But it was just like Dorothy Ann. She was always breaking into the middle of everything in that excessively matter-of-fact, practical way, spoiling any little arrangement almost as completely as even Mrs. Danesborough

could have done, though not with the same maliciousness. Mrs. Waldemar would do sister Dorothy Ann the credit of saying that she did not believe she ever did a malicious action to anyone; but still, whether it was malice or not, it came to the same thing so far as practical results were concerned. So very tiresome and unaccommodating. Just as if she could not have slipped out as easily as possible, and fetched the best teapot and the pea-green china and anything else that happened to be wanted, whilst she, Mrs. Waldemar, entertained the Doctor with a cheerful pleasant flow of conversation, just such as men of his class like to be entertained with; something light and easy and refreshing after the severer studies in which his time was employed.

Entertained him, too, all by herself, for of course Meta would have been busy upstairs

after that long journey. And Mrs. Waldemar must say that she got on so very much better with any one alone. A third party, she always thought, marred the communion of kindred minds, especially if that third party chanced to be sister Dorothy Ann. For whenever the conversation had run into a particularly interesting and confidential vein, she was sure to interrupt it with something dreadfully matter-of-fact, something about cooking or housekeeping, or that unfortunate rheumatism, which seized upon the Hackleburys as soon as they had passed the prime of life, and which she made no secret of informing everybody who came to the house, sister Waldemar had been threatened with for the last four or five years. Or if she did not get into that track, she would have a fit of the fidgets—she always did contrive to have a fit of the fidgets when

company came to tea—and then every ten minutes she would jump up from her seat with a jerk which made her nerves—Mrs. Waldemar's nerves—quiver again, and be off into the kitchen to see that nothing was happening to the pea-green china, or to scold Buttons about the doors being left on the latch, as that most aggravating of under-girls used to leave them fifty times a day; or to give some directions about the brewing of the tea and the setting of the table, giving them in such a loud voice, too, that the company could not fail to hear every word.

But then sister Hacklebury had no nervous system. She did not know what it was to be so exquisitely alive to the slightest annoyance. Sister Hacklebury was of a different temperament altogether, so exceedingly bustling and robust, almost too robust for the perfect lady. Indeed, poor dear Mr.

Waldemar used to say that no one, seeing them together, would have thought for a moment that they were sisters, Dorothy being so excessively ordinary, whilst she——but then Mr. Waldemar doted so upon his wife. It would never do for her to allow herself to dwell upon the sweetly-affectionate things he used to say to her. She believed there never was a woman doted upon like herself, and never crossed in the least thing, for fear it should bring on hysteria, or something of that sort. He was so very much alive to her nerves, was poor dear Mr. Waldemar. She did not think she should ever meet with a man again who could have such sympathy with her intensely susceptible nervous organisation, as he always made a point of manifesting. She thought she might say she ruled him entirely by her nerves, for she had but to

and she does not very much care whether or not she ever sees him again.

A person of even ordinary penetration will not be surprised to hear that the conversation which took place between Mrs. Waldemar and her sister, Miss Hacklebury, after Dr. Ellesley had returned to his college, was not of the sweetest description—indeed, that before the two ladies agreed to drop it, it had been carried on with accents and gestures which, to say the least of them, presented a striking contrast to the widow's exceedingly bland and winning manner when she stood, all smiles and animation, beside the easy-chair, gently suggesting to Dr. Ellesley the advisability of spending the residue of his evening there.

Mrs. Waldemar had rather set her mind upon a quiet evening with the Doctor. She had already experienced enough of the de-

licacy of her position in a gossiping little village like Carriden-Regis to be well aware that a *bonâ fide*, outspoken invitation, sent in due form to the Governor of the new Dissenting College, would be an incautious step—one that could not be ventured upon without exposing her to ill-natured remark. And therefore she was the more anxious to secure this opportunity, which, falling out, as it were, by the merest accident, might be so easily accounted for, might be explained away with such perfect unconsciousness, if the Rector's lady, or Mrs. Danesborough, the steward's wife, or any of the upper-class people of the place, should chance to throw out a playful inuendo in connection with the Doctor's visit to Percy Cottage.

Which inuendoes were likely enough to be thrown out, sooner or later; for both the Rectory and the residence of Mr. Danes-

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dispensing the hospitalities of Percy Cottage, worked out into actual speech soon after the Doctor had taken his departure, Miss Hacklebury meanwhile knitting on with as much brisk activity as her rheumatism would permit. Past experience had taught her how little it availed to contradict sister Waldemar, or even to venture upon the mildest form of self-defence when that lady had entrenched herself behind a nervous system so delicately wrought that a harsh word was enough to send her off into violent hysterics. She just listened, as she had listened many and many a time before, until her own nerves could bear the infliction no longer—for Miss Hacklebury had a few sensitive filaments straggling about somewhere in her internal economy, though people seldom heard anything about them—and then, as she generally used to do when her

patience was exhausted, jumped up with a vigorous bounce, and began to set the room in order, or administer a sharp series of blows to the unconscious fire, or bustle off into the kitchen to scold Buttons, just to work off the irritability which Mrs. Waldemar's interminable gurgle of complaint produced.

CHAPTER XIV.

LIFE at Percy Cottage, as is generally the case where a household consists entirely of very moderately-gifted women, was rather a *worretting* process. A family without the masculine element is something like an egg without salt, or a dish of trifle without the concealed ring which imparts such wonderful flavour and piquancy to the rest of the compound. Women were never intended to cluster together in close boroughs, paying their own taxes, looking after their own rights, slipping along through the world without that wholesome, disciplinary friction

which the presence of the sterner sex is so well calculated to produce.

Even if a man can do nothing else in a house, he seldom fails to give the women about him abundant opportunities for self-denial, and so brings out the noblest part of their nature; for does not everyone who has studied the subject at all know very well that a woman rises to the loftiest height of her womanhood when she is giving up her own will for the will of somebody else—that somebody a man, of course—and is it not therefore the wisest thing in the world that she should be placed in circumstances where she can do this as frequently as possible?—and is she ever called upon to do it so frequently as when a man's lordly fancies cry out for indulgence? So that, were it only to keep themselves from becoming selfish, women should always have

a wholesome admixture of masculine companionship in their lives.

But a man does more in a general way than keep the women about him from having time to think too much of themselves. Though undeniably productive of an untold amount of trouble in the shape of hot dinners, and carefully-prepared sauces, and various other little gastronomical dainties for which he has a natural appetency; and though when, having seen him safely off to his office or warehouse, after a good breakfast, his wife is conscious of a bounding sense of independence until such time as he comes home again to dine, still a man, if he is worthy the name at all, and not just a mere machine for bread-getting and rent-paying, does bring with him a waft of clear, invigorating, health-promoting air into his house. He supplies the needful oxygen

without which the light of home life is apt to burn dim, and the atmosphere to become stifling. A wide-awake hat, a stout stick, and a good thick Inverness wrapper, hung up in even the commonest little entrance hall, give a wonderful air of completeness to the establishment. They may suggest—doubtless they often do—the idea of will exercised a little too strongly sometimes, especially if the stick be of the rough knotted type, which a very decided, not to say despotic, man is apt to choose; they may hint of storms when dinner is half an hour late, of sudden gusts of dissatisfaction when washing-tubs fill the house with soapy fragrance, of imprecations not loud but deep, when the coffee is thick, or the steak burnt, or the mutton not done to a turn, and of remarks the reverse of complimentary when the domestic machinery sticks fast, as it

will sometimes do even in the best regulated families; but they also tell of a fresh current of outside life brought in from time to time; of freedom from that petty smallness, that inane fidgetting over trifles, that habit of exclusive occupation about personalities, which grows up in a household of women as naturally as mosses cluster on a damp wall, or lichens on the north side of a fir-tree.

The masculine element, so far as it existed at all in Percy Cottage, was supplied by Miss Hacklebury. Not that she developed the opportunities of self-sacrifice and self-denial which a man's presence naturally creates, nor yet that she supplied a daily current of needful oxygen to the very flabby and ofttimes depressing atmosphere of the household; but there was a brisk, noisy activity about her, and an energetic prompti-

tude in her ways, which perhaps not many men could have equalled. Miss Hacklebury did everything in the establishment which required the exercise of those undeniably useful faculties, designated by phrenologists Resistance and Executiveness. She was the one to send off a refractory beggar when he had proceeded from whining to impudence, and from impudence—seeing there was no hat or stick hanging up in the lobby—to downright threats of violence. The sound of that trooper-like tread down the passage to the back door, the first accents of a voice that could upon occasion issue its mandates with the authority of a commander of dragoons, were enough to intimidate the boldest vagrant that ever trespassed upon the sanctity of a virgin home, and send him trembling back into the public road with incontinent haste, forgetful of his apparently

wooden leg, or the vaunted rheumatism, more malignant even than that of the elderly Hacklebury branches, which, according to his own statement five minutes before, had incapacitated him from active exertion for the last twenty years.

It was sister Dorothy Ann, too, who confronted stray gipsy women, and sent them about their business; no such nonsense as crossing that substantial palm of hers with silver, to the intent that a handsome husband might be seen looming in the distance, or a splendid fortune prophesied from some mysterious relative who should turn up from the Indies or elsewhere. Sister Dorothy Ann paid the tradesmen's bills, and scanned their entries with mathematical exactness, and pounced down upon them severely if a sixpence or shilling happened to be put in under a wrong date; sister

Dorothy Ann transacted business with the landlord, and insisted that the men should be sent at proper times to paint the outside of the house; and she kept a sharp eye upon the rates and taxes, to see that they were not unduly imposed, and went to the Millsmany bank to get the dividends, and write out receipts; and she superintended repairs, and ordered in stores, and, in short, did everything that the most active and business-like man could have done for Percy Cottage, except bringing into it as aforesaid, a man's daily requirements of self-denial from the rest of the women folk.

But the masculine element, supplied by a woman with the heaviest of treads and the most authoritative of voices, united to an equally exceptional development of resistance and executiveness, is a widely different thing from that element coming through its own

for one moment think of yielding her prerogative because sister Hacklebury happened to have absorbed the practicality and business talent of the family into her own person. Look at their visiting list now—and Mrs. Waldemar would glance towards the enamelled card-basket, which stood in the centre of the drawing-room table, with Lady Fitzflannerly's card, Lady Fitzflannerly was the wife of the Mayor of Millsmany, lying at the top of it—look at their visiting list now, embracing all the people in Carriden-Regis, and most of those in Millsmany who were worth knowing on account of birth and breeding, and say whether a list like that, giving as it did to those who owned it such an unexceptionable position in social life, ought not to be considered a little. And who, Mrs Waldemar would like to know, but herself, had been instrumental

in raising that visiting list to its present condition? Had she not, as she might say, given her whole mind to the establishing of their position in the place? Had she not laboured as earnestly for that as sister Hacklebury had laboured in the discharge of those meaner duties of domestic management for which Providence, in giving her such a robust frame, almost rudely robust, and such masculine capacity for business, had evidently marked her out? And ought not sister Waldemar, in consideration of the services she had rendered to the social position of the family, to have *some* little authority in its government? Was she to be made a mere cipher, a complete baby, as she might say, so far as choosing or refusing was concerned? Was everything to be done without consulting her, without even so much as showing the slightest sympathy

for her lonely, distressed situation, and the exquisitely susceptible organization, &c., &c.

Here Mrs. Waldemar had recourse to her nerves, and a violent attack of hysteria generally left her mistress of the field. For as soon as the premonitory jerks and starts and twitches came on, sister Hacklebury, feeling the stirrings of compunction within her, flew to the cupboard for the sal-volatile, and by the time the attack had reached its height, she had developed a state of penitence pitiable to behold. She would give up her own views and wishes to any extent, that she would. Sister Waldemar might have the drawing-room papered with Chinese landscapes, if she chose; she might have as much company to tea as the best set of pea-green china would accommodate, and ask them as often as she liked; she might lay down any amount of new oil-

cloth in the lobby, and carpet the dining-room with Turkey, Brussels, Axminster, Kidderminster, Westminster, or any other minster that could be thought of, if only she would dry up her tears and compose her agitated nerves, and cease bemoaning herself as the most illused woman in the world, the very mark selected by adversity for its bitterest darts, the innocent victim of a tyranny which had no respect to sensitive temperaments, and which seemed to delight in trampling down a nature already crushed to the very earth by the most pitiable of bereavements.

That was how the struggle for supremacy generally ended. Sister Hacklebury would have had a heart of stone if she could have insisted upon her own rights after that, or even have ventured to remind sister Waldemar that she had any to insist upon.

Accordingly, when the violence of the storm had abated, when the screams had subsided into sobs, and the twitches had been replaced by a gentle tremor, rather pretty than otherwise, she used to retire into the domestic department, and, still having a lurking notion that she had not been quite fairly dealt with, work off the irritability, which must have vent somewhere, upon Buttons, who was always doing something that she ought not to do, or leaving something undone which she ought to do, and could therefore be visited with a scolding whenever the state of Miss Hacklebury's temper rendered such treatment advisable.

Still Buttons, who certainly *was* aggravating, greatly preferred Miss Hacklebury to her other mistress. In spite of her scoldings and fidgetings, there was a seam of real, true-hearted kindness, nay, when it was

worked by a judicious hand, something almost like tenderness, running through the hard masculinity of that worthy spinster's character. When the tempest of her displeasure had passed away, she was sure to make up for it by extra fair weather. Buttons always had an afternoon out after a diet of real hard scolding; and Miss Hacklebury invariably finished up her most severe reprimands by saying, with a certain lingering regretfulness in her tones—

"It's for your own good, Buttons. I am sure I never scold you except with the best of intentions."

A statement which Buttons replied to with a low curtsey, though at the same time she could not help thinking that the best of intentions might be carried a little too far.

But Mrs. Waldemar was mean. That was

what Buttons said Mrs. Waldemar was, as mean as ever she could hold herself together, and never seemed to be contented unless she was putting some one about. And couldn't bear anybody to have such a thing as a follower either, else why did she always ring the bell for her, Buttons, to come and do something in the dining-room, to clear up the hearth, or dust the furniture, as soon as she heard Gibbs, the milkman's lad, coming with his pails to the side passage door, ever since last fourteenth of February, when Gibbs had sent her a valentine? And why did she always contrive to send her out for an errand somewhere, or to have her busy upstairs on a Monday morning, when the grocer's man came from Millsmany for his orders, just because she had once—two or three months ago—slipped out of the side passage door to have a little

talk with him about her sister, who was married at Millsmany? She was quite sure she didn't want anything but just to ask how her sister was, and she had no more notion of his paying her any attention than if he had been the Emperor of China; and she was sure it came upon her like a clap of thunder, that it did, when he began about—about—well, it was no particular consequence what he began about, only Mrs. Waldemar was that mean she'd never given him so much as a chance to get a whisper of her ever since; because she always said she couldn't abear followers. Buttons wondered how she ever got married herself, if other people were as stingy to her as she was to the maids at Percy Cottage.

But Joanna, stitching away at her plain work whilst Buttons made these observations, only replied as before—

"Yes, she's a cunning sort, very, is Mrs. Waldemar, and mostly knows a vast more nor what folks might think she do."

CHAPTER XV.

THAT was the household into which Meta Waldemar found herself dropped one cold, rainy, miserable Easter Eve. There she was to make herself as comfortable as circumstances would allow; and when that was done, or perhaps before that was done, do what lay in her power to put a little sweetness into the lives of others.

Meta was Mr. Waldemar's only child by his first wife. Many years ago, when he had longings and aspirations and sighings after the infinite, and all those little weaknesses which lawyers' clerks do indulge in sometimes, before they are fairly launched out into lucra-

tive practice, he married a pretty young girl, gentle, amiable, and with very much more refinement of mind than he himself possessed. Just the sort of woman who, if she had lived, would have cultivated him, and perhaps little by little developed the better parts of his character, and brought him up to her own standard. But unfortunately the first Mrs. Waldemar did not live to effect these desirable improvements in her husband. After two or three years of happy married life, in a very small cottage in the neighbourhood of London, he was left a widower, with one little girl, Meta, who, after her mother's death, went to live with a great-aunt down in the south, and had continued there, with the exception of occasional visits to her father, ever since.

When Mr. Waldemar turned his thoughts a second time towards matrimony, he speculated

in an entirely different variety of feminine excellence; or rather he became himself the object of a successful speculation on the part of Miss Elizabeth Hacklebury, the youngest, though by no means youthful, daughter of a retired grocer, who lived at the town of Poplarcroft, not far from London. Like some other men, who in early life captivate women greatly their superiors, and then are left free to choose for themselves a second time, he preferred making a selection where his own moderate abilities would not be outshone by those of the lady whom he installed as mistress of his home. Fate, or perhaps a little skilful contrivance on the lady's part, drew him towards Miss Hacklebury, who became Mrs. Waldemar number two, and they lived in easy style—he having now worked himself up to a good position—in that desirable family residence

known as Percy Cottage, situated just opposite the Rectory of Carriden-Regis; neither of them thinking very often or very lovingly of the fair-haired child, fast growing into womanhood, who was year by year winning more and more of her mother's grace, and gentleness, and sweetness.

So things continued until Mr. Waldemar died, leaving behind him a very limited income for his widow and child, and a will in which, to Mrs. Waldemar's great annoyance, he stipulated that in the event of old Miss Warrener's death, Meta's step-mother was to provide suitable maintenance for his daughter at Percy Cottage. To Mrs. Waldemar's still further annoyance, Miss Warrener did die, and Meta had to come home before the late solicitor of Carriden-Regis had been in his grave a year and a half.

A most undesirable state of things, as

Mrs. Waldemar said. For Meta was a pleasant-looking, almost pretty girl, whose youthful freshness was not the most favourable of foils to the elder lady's fast-decaying charms. And besides, it was stipulated in the will, that in the event of Mrs. Waldemar's marrying again, she was still to provide a comfortable home for Meta, unless she gave up to her step-daughter the annuity which had been left for her own maintenance.

But this annuity, even with the small income which Mrs. Waldemar possessed in her own right, was scarcely enough to keep things up as they had been kept up in the late Mr. Waldemar's time. Mrs. Waldemar therefore proposed that her maiden sister, Miss Hacklebury, who was also left alone in the world, should come and reside at Percy Cottage, throwing her income into the general fund; by which arrangement they

should be able to live in a manner almost equal to that which the late solicitor's practice had supported. Retrenchment was such a nuisance; there was nothing she hated so much, Mrs. Waldemar said, as retrenchment. It made people talk so, and pass their remarks on the altered state of things, and offer their condolences on the providential reverse which had taken place, and all that sort of thing, which was, in her opinion, almost more annoying and vexatious than the actual bereavement. So Miss Hacklebury, whose sympathies when once called out were admirably prompt and practical, sold her furniture, and disposed of her house, and wound up her affairs at Poplarcroft, and took up her abode with "poor sister Waldemar."

So that was how it came to pass that this household of women had clustered to-

gether. Five women, including Buttons and Joanna, with never a man to infuse into them a little brisk outside life, or to call upon them for any care and self-denying ministration, or to keep them from falling little by little into that petty self-absorption which is so apt to overtake women who have no strong, overmastering will to bind them together; no shrine of love and reverence on which to lay their daily offerings; no mutually recognised head, no supreme power to choose and regulate and arbitrate; no well-spring of manly intelligence and experience wherefrom to fill their own shallow little vessels from time to time.

A most unnatural condition, as we have said before, but one which Mrs. Waldemar was determined should not continue a day longer than was absolutely needful.

Things were beginning to assume a totally different aspect to that which they had worn when, a few weeks after her dear departed's death, she had written to sister Hacklebury, pitifully beseeching her to come and cheer a loneliness which could only terminate with life itself. She thought now that the loneliness ought not to last quite so long as that. Indeed, she had begun to find out that she was never intended for loneliness at all, especially loneliness unaccompanied by a suitable jointure, the only condition on which it was ever to be tolerated. Miss Hacklebury, to whom of course the residence at Percy Cottage was a wonderful advance in life, introducing her as it did to such an improved social position, might say what she pleased about the pleasant freedom of their present mode of life. She might expatiate on the convenience of

not having a gentleman to wait upon and do for, and enlarge upon the delightful privilege of being able to have cold dinners as often as they chose, without fear of insincere graces before meat and heartless thanks after it. And she might animadvert, as she was so fond of doing, upon the selfishness of men and their fondness of ease and good living, and how everything must be made to give way to them; and then she might go on to say how very much better it was for women to depend upon themselves, and assert their own rights and look after their own affairs, just as she had been in the habit of doing ever since she had had any affairs to look after. Catch *her*, Miss Hacklebury used to say, tying herself up to any man, and fetching and carrying for him, and squaring her whole life according to his particular rule and

compass—no, indeed, she should be very sorry to do anything of the sort! And it was an admirable move when sister Waldemar sent for her to Percy Cottage, to join at housekeeping with her, and show the whole village how independent they could be of masculine help and masculine interference.

But sister Waldemar thought differently. It was all very well to have sister Hacklebury to do things for her when she could not get anyone else to do them; but a gentleman *was* a convenient thing, a *very* convenient thing. And she had no sympathy with all sister Hacklebury's intensely practical notions about self-dependence and self-help, and the importance of filling one's place in life with diligence and activity. So unfeminine, so essentially unfeminine, as poor dear Mr. Waldemar used to say. There

was nothing annoyed him so much as an independent woman. He often said that if there had been only one woman in all the world, and she an independent woman, he could not have brought himself to marry her. He did not refer to a woman with independent means, of course that was an entirely different thing; the more independent a woman was in *that* respect, the better; but a woman who was independent in her ways of speaking and acting. She was quite sure poor dear Mr. Waldemar would never have married her if she had been of the same turn of mind as sister Hacklebury. He liked something gentle, clinging, affectionate—something like herself, she thought she might venture to say.

And then women who had no gentlemen to take care of them were debarred from so many social privileges, particularly in Carri-

den-Regis, where the upper-class people of the place were down upon you in a body if you ventured to go to a concert or a lecture, or a public entertainment of any kind, without the orthodox dress-coat and white cravat at your elbow. Look at herself now, and sister Hacklebury, what a stupid, hum-drum life they had to lead on that very account. Not that it weighed so seriously on sister Hacklebury's mind, for she was a woman who could make herself content anywhere, so long as she had plenty of housekeeping to do, and a couple of servants to scold and fidget over. But she, Mrs. Waldemar, was differently constituted. She had a nature that yearned after higher enjoyments. She could not be content with knitting and gardening, and superintending cookery, and taking out messes of jelly and broth to sick people. That sort of thing did not satisfy

her aspirations. She wanted a different life altogether. And so she determined to marry again.

Having done this, she arranged her plans accordingly. They were a little marred, certainly, by Meta's coming home and calling upon her for the fulfilment of that clause in the late Mr. Waldemar's will which required a comfortable maintenance for his daughter out of the annuity left by him. But Meta was a nice-looking girl, elegant and rather taking in her manners. These quiet, gentle girls generally got off somehow, and sometimes did it very advantageously; and if she could once see Meta disposed of, she trusted to her own contrivance to make all the rest smooth.

So Mrs. Waldemar thought as she kissed her step-daughter affectionately, and dismissed her to bed on that first night of her home-

coming to Percy Cottage. And then she smoothed down her beautiful ringlets, and standing before the mirror, picked out a grey hair or two which had crept in among them, saying as she did so—

"A nice position, very. And a tolerably good income, too, I should fancy. And cannot be much over fifty, if at all. Just the thing!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THIS little soliloquy applied, of course, to Fergus Ellesley, D.D., Governor of the new dissenting College of Carriden-Regis. Mrs. Waldemar had turned the subject over in her own mind very frequently of late, and had made various inquiries relative to the Doctor's antecedents, family position, prospects, &c.; which inquiries resulted in the conclusion that he would be an unexceptionable successor to the dear departed whose loss she had already bewailed as much as was consistent with propriety, to say nothing of convenience. Having arrived at this conclusion, the next step was to cultivate a

gradually increasing intimacy with that dear amiable old lady, the Doctor's mother, and so prepare the way for anything further that might seem desirable.

There was but one consideration which at all marred this delightful little scheme. Mrs. Waldemar was a Church lady. As such she enjoyed the intimacy of the Rector of St. Wilfred's, his wife, and the rest of the upper-class families of the place. And Mr. Gilbertson, in common with most other high-bred clergymen residing in country parishes, had his own little views about dissent. Not that he entertained a violent party feeling against those of his parishioners who differed from himself as to the union of Church and State, or who held certain opinions relative to ecclesiastical government opposed to those which he felt himself bound as a minister of the Establishment to uphold. Nothing of

the sort. Mr. Gilbertson was thankful to say he rose above all that sort of narrow-mindedness. It was a species of bigotry with which he had not the slightest sympathy; and for his own part, he rejoiced to meet all his fellow-Christians on the broad foundation of religious charity, recognizing in them the champions of one great cause, partners in the noblest work that could engage a man's energies, fellow-helpers in the grand scheme of the world's renovation, and regeneration, and re-organization.

At least that was what Mr. Gilbertson used to say on board the platforms of those great public meetings at Millsmany. After which splendidly Catholic deliverance of his sentiments, there was always great applause on the part of the audience, and animated responses of "hear! hear!" from clerical and lay brethren on the platform, who hailed in

such broad and enlightened utterances the rapid advance of that much-prayed-for time when divided interests should be no more, and sects and parties should sink their little differences in the one great bond of Christian brotherhood.

But though Mr. Gilbertson gave utterance to such large-hearted sentiments when public duties called him to take his stand on the Millsmany platforms, side by side with the great men of the Nonconformist churches there, and though moreover he gave utterance to them with that bland, condescending courtesy which a very rich old bachelor uncle may be supposed to assume when addressing the brood of nephews and nieces who are expecting a legacy from him, still, as stated before, Mr. Gilbertson had his own private notions about dissent and dissenters. Talk about them as you would, look at

them in the most favourable light you could, they were a nuisance. A clergyman would much rather be without them. And allowing that there might be, as no person of enlightenment and liberality denied there were, men amongst them of whom, concerning their literary and classical attainments, even the Establishment itself might be proud, nevertheless, taking them as a whole—

And then Mr. Gilbertson, who generally happened to be dining with the Dean of St. Olaves, or some of the more elevated clerical brethren, when he promulgated these interior convictions of his mind, would help himself to another glass of claret, and dismiss the Dissenters with a wave of his jewelled hand. They were a nuisance. That was just what they were.

Mr. Gilbertson never called the new College at Carriden-Regis anything but a dis-

senting institution. Tolerably successful in its way, and doubtless carried on with a fair amount of business talent and energy, but still only a dissenting institution—a sort of very small retail establishment, set up in feeble opposition to those two great wholesale houses of theological produce which the State had licensed and set apart for the supply of the public needs in that direction. And he had no doubt they turned out very excellent ministers for the common population, men of good sense and ready speech, admirably calculated to grapple with the manufacturing mind, and satisfy the requirements of the flannel aristocracy, and help to keep the mill hands from sinking into utter vice and profligacy. And it was very possible, too, that in remote country parishes, where the clergyman was non-resident, or if resident, given over to fox-hunting and

dining out, the Independent, or Methodist, or Baptist, or other sectarian exhorter might to a small extent supplement his deficiences, and pour a few drops of wholesome spiritual tonic into the else uncared-for bucolic soul. But as for turning out scholarly men, men of refinement and good breeding and polite education, men who could take their stand side by side with the authorized religious instructors of the land, you might as well expect to gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles, as expect dissent to do anything of that kind.

Besides, it was a second-rate thing. Everyone knew that it was a second-rate thing. Dissent occupied the same position towards the Church, Mr. Gilbertson said, as gooseberry champagne does towards the genuine sparkling distillation of sunny Provence; very well for people who could not afford the ex-

pensive variety, but utterly out of the question for those whose palates were cultivated and critical in such matters. He had no objection to stretch out a patronising hand to Dissent when he came into contact with it on a public platform, and give it a kind word or two at a town mission meeting, where it was telling its story of lost ones reclaimed and wandering souls won from the deep of sin and misery into which the authorized governmental religion of the land had suffered them to fall. But as for recognizing it in private life, asking it to dinner, taking wine with it, treating it in that sense as a man and brother, introducing it to his wife and family, and allowing it to sit at his fireside, he really could not bring himself to anything of that sort. It was more than his position justified. And a clergyman's position was such a very sacred thing.

So Mr. Gilbertson contented himself with patronizing Dr. Ellesley and the other dissenting ministers of Millsmany at public meetings, and bowing politely to them in the street. And if they did chance to meet in the dining-room of some very liberal-spirited merchant or manufacturer, the Rector of St. Wilfred's kept at a safe distance from Hebrew derivations, or classics, or the early fathers, or German philosophy, or anything of that sort. For, as he used to say to one or two of his intimate friends, he had not the best memory in the world, a country parish was a terrible thing for rusting one's college attainments, it was almost impossible to keep oneself up to the mark in a country parish. And if the conversation *did* take a learned turn, it might be awkward for him, considering what was expected from a person in his position.

Perhaps Mr. Gilbertson was quite right.

Mrs. Waldemar was acquainted with the Rector's opinions on the subject, and had over and over again expressed her cordial approval of them when he called at Percy Cottage. Indeed, she was not a woman who ever contradicted any one, except those of her own household, and on them she exercised her gift in that line so freely that there was little need to practise it in any other direction. Accordingly, she assured the Rector from the very beginning, that she saw eye to eye with him as regarded dissent. She had never heard anyone express her own views on that subject so admirably, with such perfect clearness, as dear Mr. Gilbertson. Dissent was a second-rate thing, a decidedly second-rate thing, not to be tolerated by a person of breeding and refinement. She must say she was distressed, absolutely distressed,

when she heard that a sectarian institution was likely to be established within the parish of Carriden-Regis. She was astonished that the owner of the property could allow himself to sell it for such a purpose. She sympathised with dear Mr. Gilbertson, she deeply sympathized with him, in the pain he must feel at having his parish violated by such an intrusion; and for her part, she should consider it quite beneath her to show the slightest civility to the professors or their families when they came to reside in the place. It was the bounden duty of every good churchwoman to stand by her clergyman and assist him in maintaining his position, and not manifest the remotest approach to courtesy and good will towards those who were attempting to interfere with his duties, and deprive him of his authority.

That was what Mrs. Waldemar said, in the

late Mr. Waldemar's time, when the new buildings at Carriden-Regis were completed, and the college set on foot under an imposing array of professors, superintended by a frumpy old divine as governor. A very frumpy old divine, bristling all over with logic and orthodoxy, backed by a wife equally old and frumpy, towards whom neither expediency nor self-interest behoved that the slightest politeness should be shown.

Now, however, circumstances had altered cases. Poor dear Mr. Waldemar had passed away; so also had the logical divine and his wife. The dissenting institution of Carriden-Regis was presided over by a gentleman, to whom in virtue of his position and family and pecuniary resources, both self-interest and expediency behoved that something like politeness should be offered. If report said truly, Dr. Ellesley's descent was unexception-

able; his personal appearance and bearing indicated that, if the superior manners of his mother had not confirmed the fact. That dear, placid, pious old lady who, in the natural course of events, might soon be expected to slip away to a blissful eternity. And when she had slipped away, everyone knew what a change must take place at the college. Mrs. Waldemar thought she might as well call it a college; a name made very little difference after all. It was quite impossible that poor Dr. Ellesley could bear to toil on there alone, labouring amongst those young men without any cultivated female mind to enliven his hours of leisure; to say nothing of the social duties which Providence had devolved upon a man in his position. Of course the Governor would marry as soon as anything happened to his mother, if not before.

But how to tide over that little awkwardness about dissent. How to keep up a judicious degree of intimacy with Mr. and Mrs. Gilbertson, in virtue of whose friendship she sustained herself amongst the upper class of Carriden-Regis, and at the same time to feel her way towards agreeable relations with dear old Mrs. Ellesley and her son, concerning whose sectarian views she had expressed herself so strongly to the Rector in the late Mr. Waldemar's time. It was certainly a difficulty.

But Mrs. Waldemar had a soul that scorned difficulties. She was far too much a woman of the world to give in to them. Indeed, she rather rejoiced in a difficulty, since it gave her an opportunity of exercising that talent for scheming and contrivance upon which, privately, she so greatly prided herself; though amongst her acquaintance she

was wont to bewail herself as the simplest, most helpless creature that was ever left to struggle alone with an unkindly world. The acquaintance of Dr. and Mrs. Ellesley was a thing which she meant to accomplish, and she did accomplish it.

The Carriden-Regis church was heated by large stoves supplied with coke, and Mrs. Waldemar suddenly discovered that large stoves supplied with coke had an injurious effect upon her nervous system. She had such a sense of oppression, as she assured dear Mrs. Gilbertson, confidentially—during the afternoon service—that she was quite sure if she persisted in going, it would bring on an attack of hysteria. That would be so very awkward. There was nothing she disliked so much as creating any disturbance in a place of worship. And hysteria was not like fainting or anything of that sort. She

was sure it would be very annoying to Mr. Gilbertson if she felt herself obliged to give way, as she almost thought she should be obliged, if she exposed herself again to the effects of that horrid coke. And so would dear Mrs. Gilbertson be so kind as to mention the matter to the Rector, and assure him that if she, Mrs. Waldemar, felt obliged sometimes to stay away from morning service—the church was more oppressive in a morning than any other time of the day, perhaps because the congregation was larger, he must not think that it arose from anything like indifference or want of interest in his sermons, which, she assured Mrs. Gilbertson, were the most sweetly edifying she ever listened to, but only on account of her nerves and that terrible hysteric tendency to which her susceptible nature made her liable. Really it was quite an inconvenience to have one's nerves so exquisitely strung.

So after one or two Sunday mornings yawned away on the sofa, Mrs. Waldemar asked sister Hacklebury to walk over with her to the new college chapel. It was so frightfully dull staying at home all the day, and she had heard that the chapel was heated with steam, so admirably managed that it could not interfere with even the most sensitive nervous organization. Sister Hacklebury had no objection to dissent. So long as she heard a good plain common-sense sermon, she cared little whether it was preached by an Oxford graduate in all the glory of stole, surplice and hood, or by a simply habited layman, upon whose head no episcopal hands had ever rested in benediction. And since, with all her respect for Mr. Gilbertson as the appointed channel of spiritual edification to the Carriden-Regis mind, he did not always realize her notions of Gospel

simplicity, she was by no means averse to repair with sister Waldemar from time to time to the college chapel, where Dr. Ellesley always preached on a Sunday morning.

As the most admirable good fortune would have it, the solicitor's widow was shown into Mrs. Ellesley's pew on her first visit to the chapel. She expressed her thanks so sweetly for the accommodation vouchsafed, that that amiable old lady could not do otherwise than place it at her disposal whenever she chose to come. Not many weeks afterwards a severe attack of rheumatism, confining Mrs. Ellesley to the house, formed an unexceptionable excuse for a call from Mrs. Waldemar, who had such very great sympathy for any one affected in that way, her own dear mother having been a martyr to the same complaint. And this call, followed by divers little politenesses on the part of Mrs.

Waldemar, prepared the way for an acquaintance which was so judiciously cultivated and improved that at last Mrs. Waldemar thought she should not be trespassing too much upon it if she requested Dr. Ellesley's escort for Meta when she came home from Millsmany.

So that she might be considered to have achieved her purpose very successfully, so far as its preliminary stages went. And now there was that call of the Doctor's to be looked forward to.

[illegible]

hoped Meta would make herself quite at home at the Rectory, and go in and out whenever she liked, and join them at croquet as soon as the weather took up a little. The children doted so upon croquet, and they just wanted another player to make up their proper number. Which was of course exceedingly kind of the Rector's lady, and Mrs. Waldemar decided that Meta should avail herself of the kindness as frequently as possible, because it might lead the way to something advantageous, the young curate, Mr. Bernards, spending nearly all his spare time at the Rectory.

But on Wednesday, the first available day for calling, Dr. Ellesley made his appearance, towards the close of the afternoon.

Mrs. Waldemar valued that call very much. She quite took it as an indication on the

[illegible] desire to increase the [illegible] which already existed between [illegible] have especially [illegible] she valu[illegible] [illegible] a man like Dr. Bradley, so [illegible] and refining, so much so [illegible] that it is [illegible] why he absta[illegible] from all but absolutely needful visiting.

[illegible] was not absolutely needful. From [illegible] polite person, who had nothing else [illegible] with the time, I might have been rea[illegible] and [illegible] but not from Dr. El[illegible] [illegible] a [illegible] sent by one of the [illegible] which have fulfilled the requirements [illegible] [illegible] it at most a brief inquiry from [illegible] [illegible] Bradley herself when Mrs. Walden[illegible] [illegible] with her at the college chap[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] But a call in person, a[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] made for at a period of the afte[illegible] [illegible] when it would be the most natur[illegible] [illegible] in the world to ask the caller to sta[illegible]

to tea—indeed, people never did call at such times unless they were open to an invitation—*that* indicated something quite beyond mere ceremonious politeness. It indicated a willingness on the Doctor's part to make the most of his opportunities, a desire to avail himself of the free-and-easy hospitality which had more than once been proffered to him at Percy Cottage, and which hitherto only circumstances or Miss Hacklebury's unpleasant interference had prevented him from accepting.

There was a glow of triumph therefore on Mrs. Waldemar's olive cheek when she came, all grace and sweetness, into the room, to greet Dr. Ellesley, having previously hastened into her dressing-room to arrange her ringlets, and don the jet ornaments which became her complexion so admirably.

Meta was alone when the Doctor came.

All people were alike to her; no need to run away and attend to her personal charms when a double knock announced the advent of company. But just the old feeling of restraint crept over her as he made his salutations in the awkward, abrupt style which generally characterized his attempts to do the agreeable to ladies.

"I—I thought," he began, after a few remarks about the weather, "I thought it would be proper to come and inquire after you. I could not come before, because it is inconvenient to me to leave the college. But it was so very wet when we came from Millsmany. I—I hope you did not take cold."

The Governor began his sentences hesitatingly, often having to re-arrange the first word or two; but when he once started, he hurried along with abrupt rapidity to the

end, for fear he should lose the thread of his ideas. This made a stranger listen to him with a painful feeling of discomfort, from the impression that he did not know exactly what he was going to say. And something in his manner, too, awkward and ill at ease as it seemed, made Meta think that he had only come to inquire after her because he was obliged to do so, just as he had driven her home from Millsmany through the rain, and then walked with her from the college to Percy Cottage. What a nuisance he must begin to think her. This was already the second walk she had cost him, to say nothing of that long uncomfortable ride, and Meta disliked so much giving unnecessary trouble to anyone. She did not know what to do. The evident embarrassment of his manner quite destroyed that natural kindliness which would have prompted her to

thank him for this second piece of attention. She only said, with a restraint equal to his own,

"No, I did not take cold at all, thank you. I never do take cold. I wish I had told you that, and then you need not have taken the trouble to come."

And then, thinking that this must seem rather ungracious, she added, with a frank smile,

"But it was very kind of you to come. I am very much obliged to you for coming. I think mamma will be here directly."

Poor Meta! she had never felt so much at a loss for conversation before. She could not think of anything else to say, and so she just bent over her work, a piece of fine stitching which she was doing for Mrs. Waldemar. Mrs. Waldemar never did fine stitch-

ing, for fear it should spoil the brightness of her eyes.

Nothing in the conversational line either appeared to suggest itself to the Doctor. He just watched Meta as she sat there in the bay-window, apparently absorbed in her work. That absorption gave him a fine opportunity of studying her face by daylight. And in truth it was all he wished to study. That she scarcely spoke a word was not of the slightest consequence, he did not want her to do so, for if she had begun a brilliant conversation, it would have obliged him to say something in reply, and then that pleasant castle in the air which was weaving itself in his mind as he gazed upon her, must needs have been spoiled. All he cared for was to sit and watch her quiet downcast face, so like one that had made the sunshine of his home twenty years ago. Even in her very attitude

there was something which strangely reminded him of Agnes. He could have sat there for hours, speaking no word, content to watch that little bending figure. Agnes used to sit just in that way at the window of their old home in Carriden-Regis road, waiting for him to come from the school. Even now there came back to him the sweet, happy content with which, turning a bend in the road, he used to catch sight of that fair head, the sunlight making a halo around it, and gleaming on the little hands as they flitted to and fro upon her work, just as Meta's flitted to and fro now upon that stitching. Only Meta's face was so grave; there was no dimple upon it like that which brightened his wife's when she came to meet him at the door, and held up her rosy lips for the kiss so sweet to give and take. And he thought with a thrill of joy, such as

rarely stirs men whose youth is past, that some day the love of him might bring it there. Some day he would say to this quiet, gentle-hearted girl, "My child, I love you; come to me and be my wife."

And she would come. He knew she would come, just as Agnes had come so long ago; and he would fold her up in his heart for ever.

It was a happy thought, and it shone through his eyes in a happy brightness, as Mrs. Waldemar, in all the glory of lace lappets and jet ornaments, came floating into the room, a veritable black swan for elegance and leisurely langour. Mrs. Waldemar was not at all at a loss for conversation, as her daughter and the Doctor had been. She extended her hand with a beaming smile, and said, in such dainty accents,

"So kind of you, Dr. Ellesley, so very

kind, to come and inquire after my darling Meta. I have been telling her that we ought to have walked over to the College"—Mrs. Waldemar always called it the College now, never the dissenting institution—"to thank you for your great kindness in driving her from Millsmany, but, you see, the weather has been so very unfavourable, and I am so afraid of her. These east winds blowing over the Carriden moors are really quite distressing for people who have only been accustomed to the sunny south, are they not, my pet?"

And Mrs. Waldemar drooped her raven ringlets over Meta's fair hair, and printed a kiss on the girl's forehead, by way of showing Dr. Ellesley that she had not quite outlived the affectionate impulsiveness of her youth. Indeed, Mrs. Waldemar used to bewail her affectionate impulsiveness sometimes with the sweetest simplicity.

"You know, dearest," she would say to one or another of her lady friends amongst the aristocrats of Carriden-Regis—"You know, dearest, I cannot help it; you must bear with me, I am so very demonstrative, and I do so caress my friends. I know it is very weak and foolish, but poor dear Mr. Waldemar always encouraged me in it. You know he was so very lavish in his attentions. I was such a pet with him. Oh! you don't know what a pet I was! Poor man, he never knew how to make enough of me! It was a sad loss when he was taken from me, dear fellow! I must have affection, though, I can't live without affection and caresses!"

But it was a curious fact, or, as the aspiring young divinity students would have expressed it, a curious instance of psychological idiosyncracy, that Mrs. Waldemar's affectionate impulsiveness never betrayed itself

in the bosom of her own family. Miss Hacklebury, if called upon to speak the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, would have been compelled to admit that the only demonstration displayed there was a demonstration of gracefully refined selfishness, set down, in common with all the rest of Mrs. Waldemar's little peculiarities, to the account of exquisitely-strung nerves, and calling for an amount of patient self-denial on that long-suffering spinster's part, which, had it only been as romantic as sister Waldemar's public impulsiveness, might have made an equally effective display.

"And talking about the Carriden-Regis moors, darling," continued Mrs. Waldemar, still passing her slender fingers caressingly over Meta's hair, "reminds me I promised you should take Mrs. Gilbertson the lovely little fern which I found there last week.

You know I promised, when she called to see you on Monday, that she should have it the next day, aod she will think you so very naughty and forgetful. Had you not better run across with it now, darling? It will not take you very long. You will excuse her, will you not, Dr. Ellesley?" continued Mrs. Waldemar, turning towards the Doctor. "I daresay Mrs. Gilbertson will not keep her more than half an hour, and you will not think of leaving us before tea now, will you? I shall say, you know, that you are so *very* ungracious if you think of leaving us before tea. Now, do tell us that you will stay."

Mrs. Waldemar had the game in her own hands this time. Sister Hacklebury was out distributing tracts in her district, and no telegraphic signals of opposition, no vehement nods and expressive glances in the di-

rection of the best china closet at the top of the stairs, where the pea-green cups and saucers were reposing in blissful security, still less any brisk verbal deliverances on the part of that unperceptive lady, could disarrange Mrs. Waldemar's charming little plans. She knew that the position must be secured at once, before the enemy came upon the field in the person of sister Hacklebury, and therefore it was that with such a gentle assumption of the certainty of the fact, she said—

"You will not *think* of leaving us before tea, now, *will* you, Dr. Ellesley?"

Mrs. Waldemar was comfortably certain that with no sister Hacklebury at hand to come to the rescue, Dr. Ellesley could not think of anything of the sort.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MRS. WALDEMAR was quite correct. Destitute of the female Mentor who had served him so well on a previous occasion, Dr. Ellesley was as helpless as a hermit crab without its shell. He hesitated, began one or two sentences, but could not bring them to a suitable termination. After a third attempt at something like a truthful statement of the difficulties which stood in the way of his staying to tea at Percy Cottage, he found himself, but how he came there he could not tell, seated in the easy-chair, without his hat, without his stick, without his gloves. Where they were, he did not know; but he felt

that he could not conveniently go home without them. After that, he resigned himself to the situation.

Mrs. Waldemar's face glowed with well-won triumph. A full hour before tea-time, and sister Hacklebury safely disposed of amongst the old women in the tract district, giving them receipts for stiff necks and rheumatic joints, or doling out herb tonics and strengthening mixtures, of which she always kept a plentiful store in her private cupboard at home. Meta, too, deposited in the Rectory parlour, where Mrs. Waldemar was quite willing that a disposing Providence should keep her all the evening. It was altogether a brilliant state of affairs.

"Well, darling, and so you are going to to run away from me," she said, in her sweetest accents—and it was astonishing how sweet Mrs. Waldemar's accents could be, some-

times—as Meta came in with her hat on, and the fern wrapped up in a bit of moist paper. "You are going to run away from me. Do put something warm on, now. You know, Dr. Ellesley, she *does* feel these cold winds so, don't you, dear? And give my best love to Mrs. Gilbertson, and if she *should* press you to stay tea——"

"Oh! mamma, I shan't stay. I don't want to stay at all," said Meta, simply; and in his heart of hearts the Doctor blessed her for saying it.

Mrs. Waldemar did nothing of the sort, though. Her accents were bland as ever, but there was a little gleam of determination in her eyes as she fixed them on the unconscious Meta, and said,

"My darling, don't be rude to Mrs. Gilbertson. Nothing in the world would grieve me so much as for her to think you unmind-

ful of her kindness. And you know she was so *very* kind, and hoped you would go in to see her *every* day, and she looked forward so *very* much to your being almost like a sister to her, when you came home. I am afraid, my darling, it would look *rather* ungracious if you refused."

"Well, mamma," said Meta, simple, outspoken Meta, who always said what she thought, and thought what she said, "if she *does* ask me to stay tea, I will say that Dr. Ellesley is here, and so I can't."

Mrs. Waldemar made an expressive little grimace to her step-daughter, which said, sharply enough to anyone who could understand it, "You must not do anything of the sort." Then, with the airy playfulness which sat so gracefully upon her, she threw Meta's piece of fine stitching into a dainty work-basket lined with blue silk, and said laughingly,

"There, there, darling, run away, or you will find Mrs. Gilbertson at tea, and then you will not be able to stay at all. I believe they always take tea early on the night of the evening service. But just do as you like about remaining with her, for you know I never interfere with you in the least. And *do*, darling, shut the door very gently. Aunt Hacklebury gave my nerves such a cruel shock this afternoon, by coming back in such a bustle to fetch old linen for that poor child of Farrer's, that had fallen into the fire. Your aunt is very kind, but she knows nothing whatever of what a nature like mine feels under the influence of any sudden excitement. Good-bye, darling, and *don't* forget my love to Mrs. Gilbertson."

"Kind, you know, dear Dr. Ellesley," continued Mrs. Waldemar, when Meta had left

the room, closing the door with praiseworthy quietness; "kind, but so *excessively* matter-of-fact; no sympathy at all with a delicately-strung system like mine. She actually proposed that I should go down with her to Farrer's and help to tie up the child's head; but I never could bring myself to look upon suffering, so I was obliged to decline. It always seems to me so cruel to look upon suffering, and, you know, I'm so impulsive, and I give way at the least thing. I know it is exceedingly foolish, but I cannot help it. And so I sent Meta instead. Meta has no nerves at all, and I have no doubt she would hold the child as steadily as a hired nurse. Temperaments differ so, you know, Dr. Ellesley."

Dr. Ellesley said they did. Temperament was a subject he had studied, in connection with the adaptation of religious systems to

the various physical characteristics of human nature; but Mrs. Waldemar's remark seemed to open out a new line of inquiry. However, he had no time to follow it, for Mrs. Waldemar continued, in that musical voice of hers—

"They vary, you know, Dr. Ellesley. Poor dear Mr. Waldemar used to say he never met with anyone so sensitive as myself; and that made him so indulgent with me. I never knew what it was to have a wish ungratified in poor dear Mr. Waldemar's time. He was so beautifully kind. Indeed, he quite spoiled me for this terribly lonely life. Sister Hackleburry, you know, cannot sympathize with me at all. And I do so long for a kindred spirit. Ah! what is life without a kindred spirit?"

And Mrs. Waldemar looked into the fire, a pensive expression softening the lustre of

her dark eyes. Dr. Ellesley looked into the fire too. He did not know what else to do; his conversational powers deserting him more and more as Mrs. Waldemar kept appealing to him for concurrence in her sentiments. He could get on much better with Meta, for she evidently did not expect to be talked to. When a shy man has nothing to say, and knows that he need say nothing, he has only to wait patiently for the end; but when he has nothing to say and knows that the fair lady who is trying to draw him out expects him to say something, the situation is, to say the least of it, trying.

Dr. Ellesley was a benevolent man, and in virtue of that benevolence he could not help feeling very sorry for Mrs. Waldemar. He had a vague, misty sort of notion that she was unhappy, and that she had told him so

because she wanted him to help her. He gathered as much as this from the appealing glances which from time to time smote upon him from the opposite side of the fire. But feeling his inability to do anything, and not knowing what definite thing it was that she expected him to do, he became more and more embarrassed, and began to wish that he had not promised to stay tea. For the Doctor was a very practical man in matters of benevolence. He had so long accustomed himself never to cherish impulses of kindness without acting from them, that when the impulses were forced upon him without any imaginable means of translating them into purposes, and from purposes into actions, he was conscious of an uncomfortable feeling of failure, almost of self-reproach, like that which comes from duty neglected or wilfully put away. What could he do in the

matter of Mrs. Waldemar's nerves, beyond assenting to her frequent statements of their marvellous sensitiveness, and what could he say about that loss which she so pathetically mourned, except something very ineffectual and feeble about resignation and so forth? Not feeling even, when with great expense of care and forethought he had said it, that it had at all reached the peculiar necessities of the case.

So he could do nothing but look into the fire, wondering whether Meta really would come home, or stay and take tea at the Rectory.

She came home. After what appeared to Mrs. Waldemar a very short space of time, too short indeed for her to have done much more than lay the plan of a siege upon the outworks of the citadel, Dr. Ellesley's patient waiting had its reward. With a sigh of infi-

nite relief, though Mrs. Waldemar did not interpret it as such, he heard Meta's step in the hall, and by-and-by she was kneeling between them on the hearthrug, warming those little hands which the Doctor would so gladly have taken into his own and kept there for ever. It was so cold, she said, she did not wonder at the Carriden-Regis people being afflicted with rheumatism, if April had nothing better to give them than the east winds which were blowing over the moors just then. But Mrs. Waldemar did not stoop down and caress her this time, and bespeak the Doctor's sympathy for her delicate frame, unaccustomed as it was to northern blasts. In fact, Mrs. Waldemar was rather annoyed that her daughter had come home at all.

"Well, my pet, back again so soon?" she said, not without a little touch of asperity in her tones. "I hope you did not run away

from Mrs. Gilbertson *too* abruptly. You know, I should be so sorry for you to grieve her; and I gave you leave to stay if she was *very* anxious."

"Yes, mamma, I know you did. But I didn't want to stay," persisted Meta with genuine girl-like simplicity. "And so when she asked me to stay tea, I said I would go some other day. Besides, Mr. Bernard, the curate, was there."

"Well, my darling, and did Mr. Bernard frighten you away?" was the reply, in a tone which implied that if he had, Meta was the most foolish girl in the world to be so easily alarmed.

"No, mamma, but he was a stranger; and I don't like strangers. So I came away."

"Provoking little piece of simplicity!" thought Mrs. Waldemar to herself; and if Dr. Ellesley had not been there, she would have

read Meta a serious lesson on the folly of being so blind to her own interests as to have left the rectory under such circumstances. For Mrs. Waldemar was not a woman who concealed from young people her conviction that the ultimatum of a girl's ambition was, or ought to be, the obtaining for herself a suitable settlement in life; and that every contrivance which might tend to bring about that desirable end ought to be diligently practised. Practised covertly, if possible; but if that was not possible, then as openly as was consistent with respectability. At all events, the end must be attained. Such unworldliness as Meta was manifesting was a very pretty thing in story-books, in connection with flaxen hair and a childish innocence of manner; but in real life it was an unmitigated nuisance—the very last thing that a girl ought to be allowed to cultivate, and

which Meta must get rid of as soon as possible.

But of course Mrs. Waldemar could not tell Meta this in the presence of Dr. Ellesley. It must form the subject of a private homily at some more convenient season. Accordingly she replied with an appearance of perfect composure,

"Well, my darling, we will not say anything more about it. Only you know I should be so *very* grieved if you did not pay *every* attention to dear Mrs. Gilbertson, when she has been so kind as to ask you to make the rectory a second home. I can't *bear* to be ungrateful to anyone. There is nothing wounds me more. And I am afraid Mrs. Gilbertson *may* feel—but we won't say any more about it; run away and take your hat off."

The matter must not rest there, though, as Mrs. Waldemar had settled in her own mind.

Meta must have a lecture that very night. The girl must be made to understand from the first what was her vocation, and how every effort which might tend to its fulfilment must be put forth. Mrs. Waldemar knew very well that her own chances of a second settlement were likely to be considerably impaired by the presence of a graceful grown-up daughter like Meta; and not so much for the girl's sake as for her own, she determined that that difficulty should be disposed of as soon as possible.

"Such a shy little creature, is she not?" said Mrs. Waldemar, as she turned to the doctor again. "Shyness is such a very painful thing for a young girl. I really must try to get her into company as much as I can, so that a little of it may be rubbed off. But I am afraid she will not stay with me very long. Somebody will be coming soon and

robbing me of my treasure, just when I have begun to feel its value. And then I shall be so lonely again, so *very* lonely."

And Mrs. Waldemar looked pensive, as though to be left so very lonely, by some one coming and running away with Meta, would be such a very terrible thing. Whereas in fact it was the object upon which she had set her mind ever since she heard of old Miss Warrener's death, and for the attainment of which she determined to leave no stone unturned.

At this stage of the proceedings Miss Hacklebury made her appearance, tract-bag in hand. Active, bustling, matter-of-fact as was her wont, opening the door with an energetic promptitude which made Mrs. Waldemar cast up her eyes appealingly to the ceiling.

"Oh, Dorothy Ann, dear! *gently.* You *do*

distress me so with your way of opening the door. Excuse me, Dr. Ellesley, but you know I am so *wretchedly* sensitive, the least thing makes me give way. Dorothy Ann, dear, the doctor will stay tea with us. *Is* he not kind?"

Dorothy Ann had her own opinion about that, as she went out again, and tramped upstairs in the direction of the best china closet. But Mrs. Waldemar had stopped the telegraph wires this time, and signalling was useless.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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